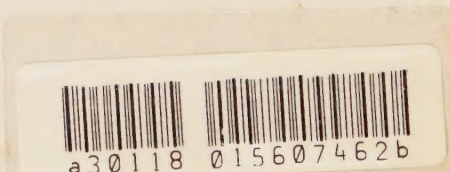
THE CHALLENGE TO SIRIUS

SHEILA KAYE-SMITH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THE CHALLENGE TO SIRIUS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

UNIFORM WITH THIS VOLUME

GREEN APPLE HARVEST
STARBRACE
SPELL LAND
THE TRAMPING METHODIST
SUSSEX GORSE
TAMARISK TOWN
JOANNA GODDEN
LITTLE ENGLAND

The Challenge to Sirius

BY

SHEILA KAYE-SMITH

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"Straight ahead burned a great lamp, . . . Sirius, symbol of the Divine Indifference."

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The Challenge to Sirius

PART I

THE ISLE OF OXNEY

§ 1

THE River Rother, rising in the springs of the marshes under Rotherfield, oozed sluggishly along the rim of Sussex—through beds of stooping reeds, under the branches of willows, by endless water-meadows and spongy pastures, by farms with red roofs and black walls, by mills and dams and locks and sluices and waterings, till it came at last, all brothed with mud, to the open sea at Rye, where the dead ships stuck their bones up through the sand.

Its tributaries were known in the district as Sewers, the largest being the Reading Sewer, which joined the river just beyond Methersham. The Reading Sewer was Kentish all the way, for at this point the Rother was one with the Kent Ditch and a boundary between the two counties. Not far beyond Reedbed it turned south, and was well in Sussex all the rest of its way to the sea. At Fivewatering it joined the Royal Military Canal, which ran north till it met the eastward curve of the Reading Sewer at Appledore. Thus an island was formed by these three streams and the marshes through which they flowed.

The Isle of Oxney was a little pip of a county wedged between Sussex and Kent. It belonged properly to Kent, but held itself aloof. Bounded on the west and north by the

Reading Sewer, on the south by the Rother and Kent Ditch, on the east by the Military Canal, it was a separate land, with old Wittersham for its London. It rose out of the marsh to a couple of hundred feet, and went hillocking east and west for about four miles, a mile less north and south. As soon as the marshes were left behind the ground became good marl, and there were many farms caught in a web of little twisting lanes. The farms were mostly tumbling places, for in the Isle of Oxney the earth was stingier than she looked, but their riot was a wholesome, vegetable kind—bright colours and soft pungent smells, like wasp-thridden apples lying in the grass. The barns with their tarred walls and great waving sprawls of roof, the oast-houses with their red cones and white cowls, were all as so many fungus growths, pushed up by the soil rather than built by man. It was hard also to think that any man ever planted those trailed and thicketed hedges, which in their way were as wild as the little woods that patched the fields.

In the summer of 1840, at noonday, a haze quivered over the Isle of Oxney, rifted here and there with sunlight. Above Wet Level the thick air throbbed with heat and hummed with the wings of flies, dancing their life-dance over the dykes and watercourses. Wet Level was on the north-west side of the Isle, spreading from the Rother, and on the hill just above it stood the farmstead of Moon's Green, with its two sentinel oasts, looking over the marshes to the hills of Kent.

John Rainger watched impatiently the life-dance of the flies. The air was full of life, winged, darting and humming, and in the grass under his feet life was crawling, growing, sprouting and blossoming. He lifted his eyes and saw a hawk poised with outspread wings above the willows where the little birds had not yet all left their nests. Life was also preying and devouring. He stood and watched the poised hawk, and a gloomy pleasure possessed him; he welcomed the one sinister touch in all that landscape of blossom and sunshine. The bright heat, mellowed by the

haze, the smell of the warm grass, the gleams of light on the watercourses, the winding row of pollards that marked the way of the Rother, the smudged colours and blurred outline of Moon's Green, filled him with a sense of aching jealousy, of having missed and lost. All he could contemplate with any pleasure was that brooding hawk, waiting for the little birds in the willows.

Not far off he could hear his son's voice, raised high in laughter and sudden shrieks of discovery, as he played with Maggie Coalbran, the farmer's daughter at Moon's Green. Rainger frowned. Frank spent far too much time with the young Coalbrans. He was already picking up their south-country accent and loutish ways—he had lately begun to grin like a yokel, that peculiar inane, meaningless grin with which ploughmen greet strangers in the lane. It was a pity Mr. Bellack could not have him for lessons in the mornings, then he would not run wild so much. As things were, he had all his mornings free, and spent them either playing with Maggie or helping with the animals in the farmyard.

It was not often that Rainger thought of his son in this way. He was generally only too glad to have him taken off his hands, to be left free for his endless lonely prowls in the surrounding country. It would have been a nuisance had he been obliged to take Frank with him or stay with him at home, and it was a comfort to feel that he was safe and happy with the Coalbrans, even if he picked up undesirable words and grins. Rainger had tramped over almost all the country within fifteen miles, such wanderings being some kind of a sop to that restless craving for change and movement which had stuck to him in spite of his reclusion at Moon's Green. He had been as far south as the Sussex coast, to where old Hastings hid among the cliffs from the new stucco St. Leonards, which it had spawned; he had been westward to the springs of the Rother, and eastward to its mouth at Rye Harbour where the air smells thick with the shipbuilders' tar; and he had wandered north among all the tangling lanes of Kent, where the long

shadows of the hop-bines fell across the hedges at sunset. Yet he did not love the country—it was only a degree better than the town, only a less obnoxious phase of that pursuing, devouring life, which bloomed as it preyed, and brought forth as it destroyed, bringing birth and death together into one terrible, rejoicing moment.

"Hullo, papa!" Frank's voice at his elbow made him start and turn round, with a look of irritable alarm which the boy knew very well.

Frank and Maggie stood knee-deep in the lush grass, her hands full of meadow-sweet and pig-nut, he carrying a bow and arrow which he had made from a piece of string and an osier bough.

"Papa, it's twelve o'clock."

Rainger looked at his watch.

"So it is. How did you guess?"

"By the sun; when it's above Kitchenhour, in June, then it's twelve."

"You're getting a regular little rustic, aren't you?" said the father contemptuously—"telling the time by the sun."

"Well, it's useful anyhow, when you haven't got a watch."

Rainger laughed, and his laugh made him almost look young.

"That's true, and if I bring you to live here, I suppose I mustn't mind you following the customs of the country. There, don't gape at me—run home quick, or you'll be late for your lessons."

Frank held out his hand to Maggie, and she took it, throwing down her bunch of pig-nut.

"If you bring that there stuff into the house, your mother dies," she said, in the tone of one imparting useful information.

"What nonsense," said Rainger. Here was a pretty comrade for his boy!

"But she does," Maggie repeated stolidly. "Lily Harman brought some höame, and that säum evenun her mother wur dead."

"That was only a coincidence—if it happened at all. Don't be such a foolish little girl."

"It doesn't matter, papa," broke in Frank, pulling at Maggie's hand. "Let her leave the flowers if she wants to —there's plenty more where they came from."

No doubt there was. Rainger felt almost savage as he thought of those tangled, sickly-scented masses, thriving in such abundance that a few dried and withered stalks hardly counted in the teeming welter of the clump.

§ 2

Frank ran home with Maggie, and washed his grubby, grass-smelling hands in the big attic that smelled of stored apples and decaying lath. Then he went down to the farm-house kitchen for dinner—cabbage and bacon, and a suet pudding which papa did not like, but which the children thought delicious, very nearly as good as the new bread which Mrs. Coalbran gave them in hot, moist handfuls from the oven on baking days. There were two young Coalbrans besides Maggie—David and Tom; but they were some years older and always hard at work, which balanced the advantages of their sex. They were curiously alike in outward appearance, with large uncouth limbs and bovine eyes and wide mouths which they seldom opened except to ask for more beer and reveal incidentally the progress of mastication. Of the two Frank preferred Tom, whom he often helped in the stables and fold. Tom oddly loved the creatures amongst whom he worked, would expand into loquacity in tales about them, knew their tastes and feelings better than he knew those of his own family, and was always ready with hands suddenly tender to caress a soft inquiring nose or shrinking neck.

Mrs. Coalbran had been housekeeper to the Raingers long ago, and when John decided to bury the failure of his life in the unaware and unreproachful country, he turned naturally to the farm where she had settled down on her marriage. She was a kind-hearted, rather stupid woman,

prematurely old, like most farmers' wives. Her husband always inspired young Frank with awe—he was so big and strong and hairy, and smelt of dung and animals' hides, and roared out commands in a deep windy voice like the echoes in a barn. To-day it was he, not Rainger, who said : " No more pudden for you to-day, Maaster Frankie, 'tis time as you wur off up to Passon's, surelye." And Frank stole out of the room without a word, which he certainly would not have done if papa had bidden him.

It was two miles to Wittersham, and on a hot day, with a satchel of books, those two miles dragged and burned. But he did not complain, even to himself ; the road to Wittersham, though he had walked it several hundred times, was full of romance and adventure, richly storied. Each bank, each gate had a memory, each lane-side farm had been the scene of some adventure. It was here, at this bend, that he had met Apollyon straddling across the way, and driven him off with a miraculus ash-stick which God had thrown down from heaven ; it was just over this gate by Boldshaves Farm that he had chased a whole tribe of Seminole Indians on the war-path, while down in the hollow by Black Brook he had seen cannibals dancing round a cauldron full of human legs and arms ; and there was the little wood at the top of the hill, Mopesden Wood, which Maggie said was full of " ghosteses "—he and she had seen them in the dusk one night, monstrous toadstool shapes lumbering about among the trees. It was to Maggie alone that he confided his adventures—other people had an unpleasant habit of reducing them to their lowest terms of bulls and calves and fogs and straying sheep.

Sometimes, however, he liked to hint to his tutor that his life was not like ordinary boys' lives. " I've seen a lot of fighting," he said one day, remembering something that David had told him about an old soldier he met at the Plough ; and Mr. Bellack had not contradicted him, but had asked in a pleasant, interested manner—what had he fought most ? To which Frank had replied : " Indians and devils and things " ; and Mr. Bellack had nodded his

head very wisely, as one who should say, "And I know what tough customers *they* are."

To-day he asked Frank if there were many Indians and devils between Moon's Green and Wittersham, as he was extremely late. The books were all laid out on the table in the Rector's cramped little study, which had a stuffy, towny air in spite of the wide view of Sussex from the windows. The map and the globe showed Frank that there would be a geography lesson. At first his education had been, like other boys', severely classical, but as the tutor came to realise his pupil's special bent he had partially shelved Horace and Lilley in favour of what he called "girls'-school studies," such as geography and history and composition. Frank, who had hated the ancient Greeks and Romans, took kindly to the peoples of almost every other time and place, and wrote long-winded essays in which he was careful to suppress his own adventures among them, however exciting these might be.

To-day he and Mr. Bellack pored together over the map of the United States, picking out the big cities and rivers, the tutor enlarging and describing, the pupil asking questions. Mr. Bellack allowed him to work off steam in a composition. Frank was supposed to have literary gifts, inherited from his father, who used, years before, to write for an evening paper, and had once even had an article in *Fraser's Magazine*. At his special request, Mr. Bellack encouraged the boy in essay-writing, though Frank's style was of an exuberance that submitted badly to classical restraint. It seemed impossible for him to see anything from an abstract or impersonal point of view, everything had to be considered in the light of how it affected him, what it had to do with him, and what he meant to do with it. Mr. Bellack had little hope of his following his father's footsteps into *Fraser's Magazine*, or even the evening paper; but he encouraged the essay-writing, as he thought it was good for Frank and taught him how to express himself, a gift he might lose among his gape-jawed playfellows at Moon's Green. Also the minutes when he sat with

his legs twisted under him and his tongue hanging out, panting and bobbing over his thumbed sheet of foolscap, were blessed intervals of respite and reflection to the Rector.

Mr. Bellack, too, was by way of being a literary man, though his works had never been published in *Fraser's Magazine*, or, for that matter, anywhere else. In a drawer of his writing-table which he always kept locked were several neat piles of manuscript, with red ink margins and Gothic titles: "Is a Return to Nature Desirable?"—"Sirius, or the Divine Indifference"—"What Erasmus would have thought of the Tractarians"—"Is Religion a Diversion of the Sex Instinct?"—"A Hundred Good Reasons for going over to Rome and a Hundred Equally Good Ones for staying where I am." None of these was finished. Mr. Bellack never started with any idea of finishing; such a course he would have looked upon as calculating in the extreme. His literary exercises were merely so many questions that he asked about life, like the questions Frank asked about his lessons, and being older than Frank he did not expect to have them answered.

To-day he spent half an hour over the first paragraph of "Are Souls Worth Saving?—an Evangelical Doubt," then turned and held out his hand for Frank's essay.

"You'll be too tired to walk home if you sit there much longer writhing and sweating like a human sacrifice on the altar of articulation. Let's see what you've said about Uncle Sam's country—um-um-um—'Washington the capital,' that's bald and obvious—'New York is not the capital, but it might be,' that requires amplification—um-um-um—'Tennessee is long and flat, Illinois is pointed at one end,' scarcely an inspired description of scenery—'Arkansas has a little bit out of the corner'—quite irrelevant, but shows observation—'Alabama has a straight line between it and Mississippi'—my dear Frank, I asked you to write an essay on a country, not on a map. 'I like the name of Oregon'—who cares what you like? 'There is latitude

and longitude in America, also Red Indians '—an anacoluthon. ' I wish I was an Indian, then I could go on the war-path and have adventures.' I've told you again and again not to bring yourself into everything you write. ' The niggers are not Red Indians.' Really, Frank, you are hopeless. ' They are slaves and eat cotton.' You've got a mind like an oil-cake mixer. ' I am going to America when I am grown up.' You say that of every country you write about. Do you mean it ? "

" Yes," said Frank sulkily, feeling hurt at the bad reception of his essay, over which he had taken a great deal of trouble.

" What will you do there ? "

" Have adventures."

" You said the other day you meant to be a farmer when you grew up."

" Yes, I'd like a farm of my own."

" You might be a farmer out in the States or in Canada, then you could see the world and have a farm at the same time."

It struck him that here was a solution of the difficulties he had always seen ahead of his charge. He had dreaded lest Rainger should persuade his son into thinking he could make a living out of journalism. He knew that the idea had been in the father's head, for he wanted Frank to take up a " gentlemanly " profession and was at the same time too poor to pay for any special training. Bellack did not think the boy would ever succeed as a writer, but neither could he imagine any one of his roving, experimenting character settling down peacefully on a farm in the Isle of Oxney. The new continent, with its wider ways, seemed made especially for Frank's enterprises.

" Are there any Redskins ? " asked the boy.

" I expect so—though you won't be quite so anxious to see them when the time comes. Now run along home—I'm tired of you."

His fingers were nervously caressing the Evangelical Doubt.

§ 3

On reaching home Frank found his father rather plaintively disposed to be kind to him. Putting his arm round the boy he asked him questions about his work at the Parsonage, and crowned the horror and embarrassment of the moment by kissing him. Papa was occasionally liable to attacks like this—sometimes they were tender, sometimes merely reminiscent and regretful. To Frank they were always acutely painful, especially when papa called him his " only comfort " or his " poor motherless boy." However, the ordeal was soon over, and he ran off, shaking himself like a puppy, to eat his supper with Maggie down by the White Dyke.

They always ate their supper out of doors on fine summer evenings, at least the bread-and-cheese part of it, drinking their milk when they came in at bedtime. He and Maggie spent most of their free time together, for as he had never been to school he had not learnt to despise girls, and as she had no little girls to play with she did not object to boys. Perhaps the chief reason he preferred her company to Tom's or Dave's was not because of the age or labours of those two, so much as their dull way of seeing everything. Maggie was the only person who ever saw things as Frank saw them. When he said, " Tom, do look at those pirates down by Maytham—they're taking all their gold off the ship and they're going to bury it under the barn at Lamb-stand "—Tom would grin stupidly and scratch his head, and say, " Lord, Frank, but you queer me, that's only old Mus' Body unlading coal at the Wharf." Maggie always saw things as Frank said they were, and had, besides, many queer adventures of her own, chiefly concerned with ghosteses and Pharisees. She knew all sorts of spells and charms and omens, and had a rhyme for everything, whether it was going to bed or getting up or changing one's clothes or setting off to market.

This evening Frank told her all about America, and how he meant to go there when he was grown up.

" I'll come too," said Maggie, as she always did.

" Yes, you can cook the dinner and look after the house, while I go out and hunt niggers and Redskins."

" Maybe they'll kill you."

" They won't. I'll kill them, and hang their scalps up in the house."

" Shall we be married, Frank ? I shud lik us to marry, as then we cud have liddle babies."

" You can have them if you like ; I shan't, they'd be a nuisance. I shall be out hunting all day, and in the evenings the Great Chief Thunder-Cloud will come and see me, and smoke the pipe of peace inside my wigwam."

" I reckon I'm tired of Indians—we've seen so many lately."

" Yes, this place is full of them, but I'll stamp 'em out, never fear. I'm on the track of a lot more in the copse down by Great Knelle—yesterday evening I saw all the braves go by in their war-paint."

" I lik Pharisees best."

" Oh, they're dull. Ghosts aren't so bad, but fairies are dull—nearly as dull as angels."

" I saw a ghost the other night."

" Did you ! Where ? "

" Down by the Reading Sewer—he wur all white, wud a fire inside him."

" Were you frightened ? "

" Yes, unaccountable . . . and there's mother calling us in to bed."

Frank still sat tickling the ripple of the stream with one foot. It was dusk, and the marshes were purple and grey, with a tawny moon hanging low above Iden Woods. Maggie rose with a little shiver, and pulled her skirt up shawl-wise over her shoulders.

" Come on, Frank—do."

" I want to wait till I see a star. "

" But mother's a-calling of us, surelye."

" I don't care—she's your mother, not mine."

" I reckon as your fäather's along of her—and look,

there's a star up over Great Knelle, it's shining in the water too. Come quick afore the ghosteses are out."

He saw she was beginning to get frightened, and scrambling to his feet he seized her arm, and they walked off together, stepping high through the rank grass.

The swale thickened ; and the marsh glowed in a haze of fog and moonlight. Scents of hay and water rose to the windows of Moon's Green, and the mists crept up its walls, so that when, half an hour later, Frank leaned out of his attic window, it was as if he looked down on a white opaque sea.

§ 4

Frank could remember a time when he had not lived in the country. It was long ago—quite four years. He had been no more than eight—a wretched age according to his present outlook, but interesting enough at the time—when he and his father and two big boxes had jolted and rumbled down to Kent in the old Ashford Mail, with its four horses and many-caped coachman. Before then they had lived in London, in a yellow house in a yellow street, and a being had lived with them called " Mamma." Mamma was much more amusing and interesting than papa. She played the piano and she sang, and sometimes she even gathered up her wide, brightly coloured skirts and danced. For some strange reason papa did not like this, and once when he came in suddenly while she was doing it, and Frank was watching her with his great friend, Mr. Bellamy, he had got quite angry and torn at his hair and whiskers and said a great deal about " the child," which Frank thought insulting. He was, moreover, very rude to Mr. Bellamy, though he called him " Sir " all the time, and Frank never saw him again after that.

It was Mr. Bellamy who had given Frank *Tom Cringle's Log* and *The Last of the Mohicans* and a great many more exciting books. He was a very nice gentleman, much nicer than papa, and he came very often to see his " pal," as he called Frank, and always brought him a present.

The boy was very angry because his father would not let him take away any of Mr. Bellamy's presents to Moon's Green, when they went down to Kent after mamma's death.

Mamma died about a month before they left London, but to Frank's great disappointment there was no funeral. She did not even die in the house. She went out one afternoon after kissing Frank, and crying a little—perhaps she was feeling ill already—and that same evening papa had a letter which made him bump his head against the table and sob. Frank had often seen his father cry—he cried more often than mamma—but to-day, for some reason, he was frightened, and crept away upstairs. The next morning papa told him that mamma was dead and that he must never speak of her again. He refused to answer any of Frank's questions, such as—what had she died of? and when would the funeral be? A little later he told him that some friends had buried mamma. Frank was bewildered, but not very unhappy—she had always been out a great deal, so that he really did not miss her much. Besides, close on her death came the excitement of packing up and moving, with the delightful thought of living for ever and ever at Moon's Green. He had already been there occasionally, once with both papa and mamma, another time with papa alone, and once by himself—when he had slept with Maggie in a big four-post bedstead, and they had had the first of all their wonderful games, pretending it was a ship, driven out of her course by the monsoon and hotly pursued by a pirate clipper, which was David and Tom in their bed, and, unfortunately for the complete success of the game, sound asleep.

It was delightful to think that Moon's Green was to be his home, and that he would always have the children to play with and the animals to feed. At first he and his father had lived away from the rest of the family in two rooms of their own, but in time Rainger had tired of having the boy continually on his hands—he wanted solitude for his preying thoughts, especially at night. So Frank was left to sleep alone in the big attic, and Mr. Rainger's bed was

moved down into what used to be their sitting-room. They ate their meals with the Coalbrans and Frank prepared his lessons for Mr. Bellack on the wide scrubbed table in the outer kitchen. He was glad to be spared his father's unrelieved companionship ; he was not more hard-hearted than most children, but he had all a young healthy animal's shrinking from failure and weakness and gloom.

§ 5

The years which dragged for the father galloped for the son. The boy had sunk into the fibre of Moon's Green, like a nail embedded in the live trunk of an oak. He would always be different in substance from his surroundings, but he belonged to the Coalbrans more than to his father.

He not only loved to play and explore with Maggie, but he liked to work with Luke Coalbran and the boys on the farm. He sometimes wished that Luke were his father instead of papa, he was so tall and strong, with dark red tints in his skin under the brown, and a beard that grew right down into his neck and up almost to his eyes. Frank never dared disobey him, and in time Coalbran dropped the " Maaster," which he had kept up longer than the rest of the family, to whom the boy had been just " Frank " for a long time. He taught him how to groom the horses and milk the cows, how to thin turnips and manure the new-sown furrows. He found him a quick pupil, more willing and more intelligent than his own sons. It soon became the regular thing for Frank to go with the sheep to Northiam Market, and he once helped Tom take a drove of bullocks across the marsh to old Tenterden town up on the Weald. That had been a wonderful day ; after the sale he had sat in the public-house and drunk beer like a man.

Rainger watched helplessly the Kentish soil become deeper and deeper ingrained in his son's hands, his speech become more and more flavorous of the local idiom, his wishes and thoughts more closely knit up with Moon's

Green, its sowings and ploughings and shorings and reapings. The games of pirates and savages, which he heard of occasionally, he welcomed as the survivals of a genteel upbringing, though he knew they had been originally inspired by that Pirate, that Savage. . . .

He made few efforts to counteract the rustic influence, he left that not very hopefully to Mr. Bellack; the only thing he could not bear, which never failed to stir him into peevish reproach, was if Frank called him "Father" instead of "Papa." Once, moreover, he was terribly shocked and grieved when, on his remarking that the doctor had brought the curate's wife a baby, Frank had said coarsely that he knew babies were born just the same way as calves. This upset Mr. Rainger very much, for not only did he think such knowledge premature and the result of Frank's doubtful experiences in the barns, but he feared that it would mean his son's penetration of that mystery in which he had wrapped his wife. According to his ideas, knowledge of the path of nature meant knowledge of the path of sin, and he could not believe that Frank, while tolerably acquainted with the one, was totally ignorant of the other.

As time went by the boy came almost to ignore his father. He would say "Good morning, papa," and then practically no more till it was time to say "Good night, papa." They met only at meals. Before noon Frank worked with the young Coalbrans in the yard and fields, after noon he went off to his tutor at Wittersham, in the evenings he prepared his lessons in the outer kitchen, or roamed about with Maggie on the marsh. This neglect was not mere callousness, it was due partly to the insistent claims of a full and eager life, partly to a conviction that his father did not care very much about him. He always seemed so indifferent, so uninterested. He still—though more rarely—had fits of plaintive and embarrassing affection, but he never took Frank out with him on his long, lonely walks, never invited him into his room, or asked him how he had spent his day. The boy had come

more and more to build his ideas of fatherly love on the relation of Luke Coalbran with his sons ; here hard work, and occasionally hard blows, were balanced by a very real comradeship, a sharing of interests that never seemed to lose its vitality. He could not believe that his own father loved him just as much in his futile, bloodless way. If he had known, he would have responded, for he was always easily swayed by affection.

One August morning he was lying in the orchard, preparing some Ovid which he had not had time to finish overnight, and to which he had been sent from the barns by Coalbran with a " Do your own wark fust afore you meddle wud ourn." He lay full length in the grass that smelt of fallen apples, watching the soft shift and flutter of the boughs as the wind moved them languidly to and fro. Behind him the farmhouse glowed like a pippin in the sunshine, giving out mixed savours of heat and rot and bread-making. He felt very happy, full of bodily well-being—his skin, his limbs, his senses all delightful means of animal experience. He buried his face in the grass, till he could smell the warm earth at its roots, and rubbed his hands in it till they were green and sweet-flavoured.

He heard voices beyond the hedge, and as they drew nearer recognised them as his father's and Mr. Bellack's. At first their conversation was only a blur of sound, but suddenly he heard the Rector say loudly, almost angrily—

" I've told you before and I tell you still that you're a fool to bury yourself down here. Why don't you go back to town and pick up your life again, and give your boy his proper chances ? "

In his father's reply he caught nothing but the word " beaten."

" The fact is," said the Rector, " you thought you could run away from life and you find you can't. You're worse off down here than you were away in the middle of things : ' Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken, but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.' "

" There's no use talking, my dear Bellack. I should

never have come if I hadn't been sure of myself as a failure. You're right—I ran away; but I ran away because I was too small to stay and fight. Life is too big for me, and "—with a strange laugh his son had never heard before—" my only hope is that death will be a better match."

They passed out of earshot, leaving Frank sitting up on his elbow, with an odd feeling as if his heart had suddenly been stopped and frozen. A shadow seemed to lie over the orchard, though the sun was shining as brightly as before. He had never heard his father speak like that, with such a convinced hopelessness in his voice. For the first time he had a glimpse of the sorrow huddled at the back of all his fretful, vexing ways. He could not understand it—he could not trace it back to any definite source in that life he had forsaken—run away from, as Mr. Bellack said. But into the boy's heart crept a sort of chilled reverence, a feeling of pity and awe. For the first time the waters of the abyss had parted and he had looked down on the face of human trouble, bleeding, rebellious, blind.

§ 6

When Frank was about seventeen a new interest came into his life. For the first time he had the companionship of a boy of his own age and class. A widowed sister of Mr. Bellack's died, leaving her son an orphan, with nowhere to go for his school holidays except Wittersham Parsonage.

Richard Leigh was in the sixth at Charterhouse, and though no more than eighteen gave Frank a first impression of being years older than himself. Not that he was so tall or so well grown as young Rainger, who was a fine hardy creature, physically a man, though, owing to the simplicity and seclusion of his life, little more than a child in experience and thought. During their first half-hour together Leigh made Frank feel quite abashed by his age and wisdom—though later on, when he found the Rector's nephew could not tell wheat from barley, had never seen

a hop-garden till he came to Wittersham, had no idea what oast-houses were for, and had never heard of hornless Scotch cattle, a great deal of his respect subsided into the same half-contemptuous tolerance with which Richard viewed his bumpkin roughness and private education.

But the boys soon found they had one thing in common, which ended in drawing them together rather closely. Frank still persevered with his writing, directed by Mr. Bellack and encouraged by his father. He wrote, too, not only in school hours, but often in the solitude of his attic. Those games of adventure, which used to fill his thoughts, had come to an end—stopped more by Maggie's growing years and duties than his own—but the wild, questing part of him which had found expression in them demanded expression still, and all through the day's work its voice would clamour louder and louder, till at last at night he was able to satisfy it, writing fast in the smell of apples by the light of a candle mixed with the light of the moon.

He never showed these efforts to his tutor—they belonged too much to the secret territory of his old games, they stood apart from the essays he was learning at last to write discreetly on matters of history, literature, and such-like. He did not show them even to Maggie—at least, not often—though they were mostly about the country where he and she used to wander together, and sometimes wandered still: Wet Level at moonrise, when the dykes are white slats across the dusk, or the sun-soaked highlands north of the Reading Sewer, where the old, old villages of the Weald, Tenterden, and Benenden, and Biddenden, look down on the Isle of Oxney from the hills. He hardly knew why he had withdrawn from her this much of his confidence. He felt vaguely that she was growing older much faster than he, she was becoming engrossed in all the little bustle of the day—the dairy, the chickens, the baking and bed-making; she also occasionally went for walks with other boys—boys who had suddenly sprung up from nowhere among the farms, and whose ideas and conversation Frank knew must be very different from his.

Then one day he found out that Richard Leigh also spent his evenings in covering odd pieces of paper with scribble. Moreover, he told Frank that when he left Charterhouse, he meant to avoid Oxford if he could, and go up straight to London and make his name as a writer. A cousin of his was editor of a daily paper, and had promised to give him work on it as a beginning.

" He showed one of my manuscripts to Charles Mackay, who said it was full of promise," he declared triumphantly.

Frank was impressed to the point of confiding his own achievements.

" My father wants me to go up to London some day," he added, " and write for the papers. He used to write for 'em himself, and he once had an article in *Fraser's Magazine.*"

" I never should have thought you were the kind of chap to write. You look too much of a farmer and all that."

" Reckon I'd sooner be a farmer than a writer, but my father's unaccountable set on it."

" Does he know any editors or owners ? "

" I dunno."

" Well, it's not much good your going up, then, unless you've got wonderful talent. Let's see some of your stuff. If it's good I can send it to my cousin and ask him to show it to Mackay."

The next day, trembling with mingled delight and reluctance, Frank brought to the Parsonage three filthy sheets of foolscap, stained with soil and candle-grease, and titled : " The Old Barn beside the White Kemp Sewer."

Leigh read them through, and approved, with some reservations.

" It's uncommon, certainly. But it's funny how soon you get lost in your sentences, and some of your expressions are quite vulgar. If you like I'll help you revise it, and then we can send it to Cousin Pauncefort"

Frank was willing and grateful, so Richard set to work,

and purged "The Old Barn" to the right state of lucidity and refinement. By the time he had done, the style might have come straight from the pure wells of the great Mackay himself instead of from the sweatings of Frank's crammed, muddled brain. Young Rainger was deeply impressed by the "hithers" and "commences," by all the genteel Latinising of his Kentish-Gothic. It is true that "The Old Barn" now looked exactly like one of his essays for Mr. Bellack, but he was always diffident and doubtful where his literary efforts were concerned.

The manuscript was duly sent off, and duly lost by Cousin Pauncefort of the *Daily Post*, who, however, had glanced at it long enough to be able to write quite an encouraging—if rather vague—letter about it to Leigh, regretting that he could not show it to Mr. Mackay, as he did not like to trespass for a second time on his kindness, but saying that he had examined it himself and found it highly promising in every way. Frank was delighted, and a friendship sprang up between the boys, who at first had been inclined to look down on each other. Rainger spent most of his evenings at the Parsonage; he still read with Mr. Bellack in the afternoons, as owing to the shortness of the hours, it was thought better to do without the usual holidays. Leigh lent him books—not the old classics which Mr. Bellack had often given him to take home, but the new novels every one was talking about, such as *Jane Eyre* and *Mary Barton*, *Vanity Fair* and *Dombey and Son*.

He also showed him his own work, which astonished Frank by its erotic nature. It was full of red lips and white bosoms and kisses that scorched and limbs that clung. It both impressed and repulsed young Rainger, as also did Leigh's talk on similar subjects, part of which he could not understand and part of which was about things he looked upon as so simple and natural that he could not think why the other made such a fuss about them.

On the whole, though, he liked Richard, and missed him very much when he went back to Charterhouse in

September. For the first time he had been mentally and intellectually stimulated—he did not count his reading with Mr. Bellack, whom Leigh had taught him to look on as rather an old fogey—and the new wine had gone to his head. He pined for talk of books and writers, the eager interchanging of ideas, and above all for help and sympathy with his own work, which was now once more an attic secret. For the first time he began to see something attractive in his father's wishes for his future. He felt that he would like to go up to London and meet all those splendid people, Thackeray and Dickens and Macaulay and Trollope and Reade—and incidentally win fame and reputation for himself. Before Richard came he had nearly made up his mind to be a farmer like Coalbran, to live and die on the soil his plough tore and his spade broke. Now such plans no longer satisfied him—he wanted to see London with its jostle and dazzle, its night-soil of experience to fertilise greatness.

For some days he was moody and dissatisfied ; a part of him which till then had lain asleep was now awake and demanding exercise. For the first time he saw confinement in the red, bulging walls of Moon's Green, and putrefaction in those Kentish fields and tangle-woods. He felt that he was wasting his youth here where life crept sluggishly through the repetition of the same day. Sometimes a fear would seize him of having to live always in back water, and he longed to strike out into the roar and spate, to be one with the thundering irresistible current of life, even if it should at last throw him broken on the rocks.

§ 7

However, this mood soon passed. His mind was too active for prolonged brooding, and his normal tendency was to let the future take care of itself. After all it was his father's wish that he should go to London some day, and meantime the Isle of Oxney was crammed with beauty for him to love and take. Somehow it was not till now, when

his loyalty had faltered, that he fully realised the seizable riches zoned in that green ring of marsh. The slow creep of autumn, when each day put some coloured surprise into meadow and lane, when for scarcely two succeeding hours could one rib of weald stay the same under the changing sky, brought him back into all the old eagerness of his love, with that bite of curiosity which is always needed to make love an adventure. He began to take longer walks than he had ever taken before—not as long as his father's, for he never had more than half a day to give to them but walks into new country by new ways, across the marshes of the Reading Sewer to Great Job's Cross or Delmonden, or to Reading Street, where the Sewer joins the Military Canal, or across the Rother and the Kent Ditch into Sussex and many strange woods. . . .

He took these walks alone, for there was no one to go with him. He had never been inclined to make friends with the boys on the surrounding farms, the young Hoads of Birdskitchen, or the Harmans of Mockbeggar, or the Pilchers of Ham Green. They were most of them more turnip-headed even than the young Coalbrans, and in spite of his father's fears for him Frank was not so utterly a bumpkin that he could do with comrades whose thoughts and inventions seldom went far beyond hops.

Dave and Tom were too busy, and too lazy when they were not busy, to come with him for rambles, though he occasionally helped Tom drive the beasts to market at Northiam or Tenterden. Sometimes Tom was almost a companion, for he was full of endless talk of his animals, with anecdotes about them which in their coarse, homely way were as full of imagination as any of Frank's old stories of pirates and Indians. Also he was a great man with his fists, and had a reputation as a boxer which made him glorious in young Rainger's eyes. Sometimes Tom would take him on for a bit and give him a bloody nose or a black eye, which still further increased his respect.

As for Maggie, it seemed a long time since they had had any walks or adventures together.

" You never come out with me now as you used to," he said to her once. She was on her way from the dairy to the kitchen carrying a wide flat pan of buttermilk, and her hair and gown seemed to breathe out the same pleasant, rancid smell.

" No, it's a gurt while since we had our walks together. We're both too busy, I reckon."

" I've plenty of time to go for walks by myself and you with other boys."

" Oh, I've a-done wud that—gurt louts as they are round hereabouts. I'd go willingly wud you, Frank—only we never seem to think of it."

He stood silent a moment, looking at her and twisting a bit of straw rope. She was nearly as tall as he, with a stoutish, not uncomely figure—some day she would be a big woman, but just now the awkwardness and immaturities of her adolescence were more marked than his. She was like a strong young foal, all conscious of her limbs.

" Will you come with me to Cranbrook ? " he asked suddenly.

" Why to Cranbrook ? "

" There's to be a circus in the town next Tuesday, with elephants and camels and clowns and such like."

Maggie's eyes grew round, but during the last few years she had learned to hesitate.

" How shall we get there ? "

Frank laughed. " On our legs, I reckon."

" But it ud täake all day."

" We'd be there in time for the show in the evening, and we could walk home all night, so as to be back here in time for work next morning."

Maggie was silent.

" Do come, Maggie—it'll be like old times. Do you remember that night we spent down in the old barn by Marsh Quarter ? At least we would have spent it, if we hadn't been so unaccountable frightened that we ran home squealing before twelve."

" I know—but we're older now."

" Don't you go talking as if we were both a hundred. I'm not too old to walk to Cranbrook, and I reckon you aren't either."

" Wot'll Fäather and Mother say ? "

Frank laughed again. " We needn't worry about that till we get back. I don't see why they need grumble much. We shan't miss more than a day's work."

" I've got no money."

" That doesn't matter. I've enough for both. Papa gave me five shillings on my birthday, and I haven't spent any of it yet. It'll be just about splendid. We'll have a glorious time. I'd meant to go myself anyhow, but I'll enjoy it a hundred times more if you come with me."

His face was very close to hers over the buttermilk pan—his laughing, eager face, all freckled and sunburnt, with its good white teeth and mop of reddish brown hair. Maggie did not speak for a moment, she was gazing at him with a soft look in her eyes. Then " I'll come," she said at last. " I reckon it'll be worth it, even if Fäather beats us."

" He won't," said Frank ; " why should he ? Hurray, Maggie ! We'll have the happiest day of our lives. It'll be like our old games. Thank you so much for saying you'll come."

He stooped forward across the milk-pan, and kissed her with rough tenderness. For some time kissing had ceased between them.

§ 8

Tuesday was a fine day—indeed the weather for the whole week had been so fair and settled that Frank need not have lain awake most of the night fearing that it would rain, and that Maggie with a girl's unreasonable objection to getting wet would refuse to go with him. His wakefulness was also due to his own excitement. Richard Leigh would have been contemptuous indeed if he had known that Frank could lie awake in wild anticipation of a travelling circus. But young Rainger had never been to one

before, and was unsophisticated enough to be thrilled by the thought of seeing "twenty Punjab elephants; eight performing bears; the wonder of the desert—Ruffio's talking camel; and six comical clowns." He had resolved to go the moment he had seen the gay-coloured poster stuck on Corkwood Bridge, and it seemed strange to him now that it had not been till that accidental meeting outside the dairy that he had thought of asking Maggie to go with him.

She was waiting for him this morning at the yard gate, her cheeks red with the early cold, her shoulders hunched into a huge grey shawl, in the corner of which she carried bread and cheese for their breakfast.

"No one heard me," she said as he came—"did they hear you?"

He shook his head.

"They're all asleep, even papa—I stopped and listened at his door on my way down. I left a message on the kitchen table saying we'd be back by to-morrow's dawn and nobody need worry."

"I wäonder wot Fäather 'ull say when he knows."

"It doesn't matter what he says—we'll be three miles on the road by then."

"But when we come back."

"I tell you it'll be time to think of that when it comes. But there's no need for you to be so frightened, we're not doing anything wrong. Why, I very nearly told 'em all last night, only you never know how folk 'll take things that are a bit out of the ordinary. It's 'do the same to-day as you did yesterday and 'ull do to-morrow' with the people here. You're getting a little bit that way yourself, Maggie."

She flushed and looked at him sadly.

"Döan't go thinking that of me, Frank."

"Well, you shouldn't talk like it then. Now don't fret—take my arm and step out, cos' it's cold."

She slipped her arm through his and they tramped down the lane, straining close to each other for warmth

in the chill dawn-wind that puffed from the Rother. The sun had not yet risen, and one or two stars still hung shivering lamps over Reedbed and Marsh Quarter. The reeds moaned and bowed along the dykes, chattering dismally as the breeze swept through them, and now and then the water-fowl would call from the Reading Sewer, their wailing voices like the cry of ghosts. It was that saddest hour before the dawn, when the world looks weary in the first light, almost as if it would like to creep back for ever into the darkness.

Somehow that grey landscape with its mourning voice made Frank think of his father—he found himself wondering if at that moment he was waking at Moon's Green, seeing the grey light creep under the blind, hearing the water-fowl call and the wind moan. . . . "Maggie," he said, rubbing his shoulder against hers for comfort, "do let's talk of something—Wet Level is so sad this morning."

When they came to the high ground beyond Ethnam the sky was growing lighter and the dawn broke into colours over eastward Ihornden. Pale stripes of rose and yellow quivered above the Weald, and a red light moved like flames before them up the lane. Frank and Maggie felt warmer, though they could still watch their breath hang like smoke on the snapping air. They took out their parcels of bread and cheese, and ate them there in the hungry kindling of the sunrise, watching the first harsh lights faint and subdue themselves as the sun came out of the east, and all the hills of Kent grew hazed and mellow in the creeping warmth.

Frank was not quite sure of the road to Cranbrook, having never been further north than Benenden, but he knew the general lie of their way, and struck north-west along the hanger of Rolvenden Hill, through Elphee's Wood towards Skullsgate and Nineveh. Maggie followed him unquestioningly, as she had done on many an earlier adventure. They were both in high spirits now; she had ceased to dread an uncertain future, and he had lost that depression which had gripped him on the mourning, wind-

thridden marsh. He saw nothing but the chequered hills ahead, all warm with patched colours and travelling light, while Maggie's thoughts ran on no further than the spangles of the evening show.

At Nineveh they paused and had a drink of a little stream ; for it was now warm enough to rest, and they were thirsty enough to find the earth-flavoured water taste good in Frank's cupped hands. They were in a hollow, with the fields dipping round them, shagged with thorn-bushes and bracken, here and there the white dot of a horse-mushroom, while the roofs of Nineveh Farm swam in sunshine on the top of the hill, and the cowls of the oasts of Little Nineveh showed through the pollards beside the brook.

They had grown hungry again, but their bread and cheese was finished, so they left the stream and straggled along the hedges, eating blackberries and sloes. They came to the lane at Crit Hall, and Frank joyfully made out " Cran-brook " on the arm of a sun-peeled sign-post at the throws. There was also a little shop smelling of tea and candles, where they bought cheese, apples, new bread, and great hunks of under-baked plum cake.

It was now quite hot, the short, burning noon-hour of an autumn day. Flies and gnats suddenly appeared, to hum and dance about the ditches as in June ; now and then a late butterfly would hover greeny-white above a scentless, dew-soaked October flower ; and in the hedges and spinneys the thrushes sang as if there were no swallows gathering on the barn-roofs for their flight overseas.

Frank and Maggie, who had tramped linked and silent through the cold, now walked each along a different hedge, picking and nibbling, chattering volubly. It was just like old times, only on this occasion they dared pro-portionately with their years. Now and then they would pull themselves from the wayside and walk briskly for about half a mile, soon to dawdle again, as the heat made them sweat. Thanks to their early rising and the sharp marching-weather of the first few hours, they were in

plenty of time. It was about half-past three when they first looked down on Cranbrook from the cross-roads at Bere Tilt.

The red roofs seemed to have melted and run together in the sun, and lay like a crimson smear on the fields, faintly smeethed with the mists of heat and wood-smoke. The church tower rose stark and dun against the carnival colours of Coursehoarne Wood, and to the right of it the boy and girl saw a mock-city of tents and caravans, streaked by blue spirals of smoke, and jingling with a strange little tune, which the distance thinned into a tinkle, like ghosts' music.

§ 9

The Circus occupied the whole of a big water-meadow outside the town. In the middle was the tent where performances were held three times a day, while round this were grouped the various booths and side-shows — booths for dancing and for fighting, for playing skittles or thimble-rig, for telling fortunes, for buying sweets and ginger-beer, for seeing a living skeleton, and all sorts of other amusing and instructive things.

The entrance fee was seldom more than a penny, and Frank and Maggie were resolved to get every atom of pleasure out of their day. In spite of their long walk through the heat, they were still full of energy, and wandered round from tent to tent, peering, poking, staring and laughing, till six o'clock, when the Grand Performance of Ruffio's Star Circus was to begin.

"Oh, Frank, I'm justabout glad we came," Maggie cried once, squeezing his arm, and in the Living Skeleton's tent the tears came into her eyes as the rapture of the day filled her heart too full for words. She clung hard to his arm all the time, for the big jostling crowd alarmed her, and once an old stall-keeper said: "Buy a ribbon fur your sweetheart, Muster," which made them both laugh outrageously.

Ten minutes to six saw them squeezed into the front

row of the best seats in the Circus-tent, their eyes glued on the flap from behind which would appear the Punjab elephants and performing bears. The air was stifling, reeking of stables, sawdust and Sunday clothes; but to Frank it was the pure breeze of adventure, and till the end of his life he would never sniff that peculiar ammoniacal smell of sawdust and ill-kept animals without feeling over again at least some of the throb and delight of that hour. He and Maggie took hands when the flap lifted and forth upon a fiery if slightly spavined steed bounded a beautiful lady in fluffy yellow skirts and flesh-pink tights, which Maggie in a first spasm of horror thought were her bare legs.

From that moment came a long procession of joy, marvel and hilarity. For two hours they sat in shy worship of beautiful amazons who stood on the backs of galloping horses and leaped through hoops, and smiled and smiled—or with round mouths, craned necks, and gripping hands they watched while the acrobats swung like monkeys from their trapezes or Signor Ruffio commanded and defied his snarling bears—or held their sides, bending and aching with laughter, when the elephant knocked over the clown with his trunk, or the ring-master pulled his seat away just as he was going to sit down.

It grew hotter and hotter. Their faces were crimson and moist, their clothes stuck to their shoulders. The audience steamed, and a miasma of heat and dust hung over the ring; from the back rows came the whining of babies, and unpleasantly near Maggie somebody was sick. But nothing could dim the enjoyment of those hours, though when they came out into the cool night air their heads were swimming and aching, still echoing with the thud of hoofs and the crack of whips and that music which throughout the show had jigged the same tinkling tune.

"Wasn't it fine?" said Frank.

"Justabout fine," echoed Maggie—"those gurt beasts. . . . Tom wud have liked to see them."

"And those horses! . . . My! if I could ride like that . . .!"

They stood clinging together in the jostle of the crowd. The sky was quite dark above the lights of the Circus. Now and then a sudden glow would pass over the faces of the crowd and show Frank and Maggie each other's smiles. The stalls twinkled with dozens of little candles, stuck in tallow sockets among the fairings, and from the swaying curtains of booths came shafts and fans of brightness, while over everything hung a troubled red haze like the nimbus of a town.

"Ought we to be starting home?" breathed Maggie at last.

"There's no need yet. We can wait till the place shuts. It didn't take us over half a day to get here."

They turned off to the left, following the current of the crowd more than any definite inclination. They came to a dancing booth, gaudy with lights and already full of twirling couples.

"Let's go in," suggested Frank the untirable, and they went in, having paid their pennies. The floor was just the bare soil, and the music was provided by a hurdy-gurdy. The atmosphere was indescribable.

"I've never danced before," said Maggie.

"Nor have I," said Frank, "but let's try."

He put his arms round her waist as the other lads were doing, and they hopped round to the tune of "Villikins and his Dinah" on the hurdy-gurdy. It was terribly hot, and the air smelt strong of human bodies. There was also a queer smell of scent, a kind of sandalwood, which must have belonged to one of the gipsy girls, of whom there were several. Some gipsy men were dancing too, but most of the revellers were farmers' sons and their sweethearts, dairy girls and ploughboys.

Frank was naturally quick and graceful, and had soon got the rhythm of the dance. He held Maggie very close, to prevent the others bumping into her, and also that he might drag her round more easily, as she was not so quick at picking up the step as he. The hair of some of the girls came loose, and he saw one boy kiss his partner as he

danced. There were giggles and scuffles, and more kisses. He began to feel tired, but he would not stop before the music—Maggie was very heavy to pull round, and it stuck him that she was not enjoying it as much as she ought. They bumped into a twirling couple, and when he shyly apologised the girl leaned back till her shoulders touched him and smiled a slow, strange smile, which made the blood suddenly rush over his skin and his heart quicken and thump. . . .

"Shall we stop fur a bit?" said Maggie against his sleeve.

"It 'ud be a shame to stop before the end of the dance."

He spoke almost crossly. For some reason he felt uneasy and ashamed. He had been wrong—things were not the same as they used to be. They were different, strange—they had all got twisted somehow. He felt tired and grown-up, and though he would not stop before the music, he was quite inexplicably relieved when the hurdy-gurdy suddenly grunted into silence.

"Let's go out and get cool," he said to Maggie—and out in the clear, nipping air his fatigue and disillusion suddenly passed. All he knew was, that he would not go into that dancing booth again.

They wandered round the stalls, bought some ginger-beer and sugar-sticks, and tried their luck, without avail, at thimble-rig. Now and then Maggie hinted that they ought to start for home, but it was not in Frank's nature to leave the Circus till he had explored its ultimate mysteries. He knew that if he left one booth unvisited, the regret of his missed opportunity would follow him for weeks. The Circus, with its tinkle and dazzle, its dangers and secrets, its sawdust and spangles and wild beasts, had taken the place of London in his imagination, and become the symbol of life itself, never to be let go till it had blessed him.

They came last of all to the fighting booth. Here on a raised platform a big gipsy displayed his muscles and challenged the local youth to fight him. Maggie did not

like seeing the fights, which were always extremely bloody, but Frank's enthusiasm was unquenchable, and for half an hour she stood staring at the grass, while he craned and shouted with the ploughmen and farmers. Then suddenly she felt him move, and looked up with a sigh of relief which the next moment was choked into a gasp of horror. Frank was elbowing his way through the spectators up to the platform. She opened her mouth to call him back, but her voice dried in her throat. She was unable to move or cry as she saw him strip off his coat and shirt and advance to shake the gipsy's hairy paw. When at last the power came back to her, she knew it was too late, and that Frank would be furious if she meddled now.

During this fight she did not look at the grass. She stared in helpless anguish at the combatants, not missing a movement of either. Frank squared up very prettily to the gipsy, making the good fist Tom had taught him. It was the gipsy's practice to let his adversaries get in a few blows at the beginning—it flattered their vanity, encouraged others, and hurt him not at all. So Frank's fist landed once or twice on that huge invulnerable body, doing more damage to his own knuckles than his opponent's ribs. Then suddenly Decimus Lee let fly, and the boy was doubled up in the farthest corner of the ring.

"Frank, come down! You've had enough!" cried Maggie, giving voice at last.

The crowd laughed, peering round to look at her; and Frank, who was on his legs again, shouted "Be quiet, Maggie!" quite roughly, and faced the gipsy for the second round.

In physique it was about the most unequal match of the evening. Frank's white slim body, still unformed and coltish at the joints, looked ridiculously frail beside Lee's towering bulk; but young Rainger had been trained by a good master, and he put up a better fight than many a bigger man. He was also far more persevering, and whereas most of the ploughboys retired after their first fall, or bloody nose, Frank still stood his ground after several falls

and while the blood was streaming down his face. The crowd was delighted at this display of gameness, and encouraged him vociferously, drowning in applause and laughter Maggie's piteous entreaties to stop the fight.

She felt as if she stood in a horrible nightmare, conscious of nothing but Frank up there on the platform, one eye completely closed and the blood trickling down his face right over the white skin of his chest. "He's a game young feller and you should be proud of him," said the big farmer at her side, to whom she turned in entreaty; "it 'ud ha' bin justabout fine sport if the other lads had stood up to him lik that."

But Lee began to weary of the fight, which had dragged much beyond the limit of such things, and by taking up his time was defrauding him of shillings. He saw that nothing but a knock-out would make this lad own himself beaten, so he gave him one without more ado, and Frank lay white and crumpled in the sawdust.

"Stand clear!" shouted the referee, a little half-breed in a waistcoat bright with spade guineas. But every one began to crowd on to the platform, and Maggie thought she would be crushed before she could get to Frank's side.

"Stand back, I say! Give him air!"

The boy was coming to, and sat up just as at last Maggie reached him. She could not speak, her breast was shaken with sobs and panting, she could only kneel beside him and try to wipe the blood off with her apron.

"He's right enough now," said the big farmer, "döan't you worrit, liddle maid. He put up a good fight, surelye."

"My head aches," said Frank stupidly.

"Reckon it does, young feller. Täake my advice and go straight home, and put some raw meat on that eye of yourn."

He staggered to his feet and Heron, the referee, hurried him into his clothes, while his son Jeremy strewed fresh sawdust on the ring, for they were anxious to start the fighting again as soon as possible.

At last he was ready, and the crowd parted to let him

and Maggie go through to the door. Many injunctions were shouted at them as to the application of raw meat, the desirability of a nip of spirits, or a linseed poultice, and other advice not easy to follow in their present circumstances. Frank walked stumblingly, clutching Maggie's arm ; lights and faces swam before him—and then at last they were outside in the cool and blessed dark.

" Shall we go home now ? " asked the girl timidly.

" Yes," mumbled Frank, " I reckon we've seen everything there is to see."

§ 10

No sooner had they left the Circus-field than they realised they were dropping with weariness. Apart from the messing-up Frank had received at the hands of Decimus Lee, this was not hard to account for. They had tramped sixteen miles since morning, had visited every booth in the show, their only rest two stifling hours of excitement in the big tent, they had danced furiously in the dancing booth—it was scarcely to be wondered at that now they found themselves aching from head to foot, sick, dizzy, and bleareyed with exhaustion.

" Could we rest a bit ? " asked Maggie. " I'm sure you ought to rest, Frank."

" Never mind about me. Are you tired ? "

" Larmentable."

" Let's go into that barn, then. We can wait an hour before we start."

There was a big barn not far off, which on closer inspection was found to be conveniently full of hay. Here they could rest till it was time to begin that long tramp through the starlit lanes, which at present neither could bear to think of."

" I wish I'd something to put on your face," said Maggie, as they crept into the hay.

" It's all right," he said dully.

" Oh, Frank, why did you go fighting lik that ? " and

then the weariness, fright and misery of the last half-hour overwhelmed poor Maggie, and she burst into tears.

"Maggie, don't—don't——" He came closer and put his arms round her, but she sobbed more heart-brokenly than ever.

"Don't cry, Maggie—don't—or you'll make me feel sorry I fought him, and I'm not—not a bit—it was splendid."

"But your poor face . . ."

"Never mind my face. It'll be all right in a day or two. Yours will be pretty near as ugly as mine if you go on crying like that."

After a while she grew calmer, and they lay back in the hay, making the most of their short time of rest.

"I reckon we shan't be so tired, walking in the dark," said Frank. "Do you remember that day we walked up the Fivewatering Sewer to Becket's House? We came back in half the time it took us to go."

"How long have we got to rest?"

"Three-quarters of an hour—we'll move when the handle of the Plough gets over the church tower."

But long before the Plough had ceased to dip into the woods they were both sound asleep, curled up like animals in the hay.

§ II

Frank was roused by a shaft of crimson sunrise pouring through a crack in the wall on to his forehead. He twisted drowsily, and moaned a little, wondering why his head ached. Then suddenly full awakening came, and he started up, staring wildly round him.

"Maggie!" he cried, "we've slept all night."

She was lying a few feet off, huddled up in her shawl, under a flap of which her face showed rosy and tranquil. He shook her arm, and her eyes opened.

"Frank—you here!"

Then suddenly she too remembered, and stumbled up half in tears.

"Oh, wotsumdever shall we do? Wotsumdever shall we do?"

"It doesn't really matter—except that I'll lose this afternoon's lessons as well as yesterday's."

"And this is my day for butter-making."

It was by the work they missed that they measured their crime.

"Well, it can't be helped. Anyhow I feel better, and I reckon we'll walk much faster than we could have walked last night."

"Your face is unaccountable swollen still."

"It doesn't hurt so much, though, and I can see out of my eye. Come along, Maggie—be quick."

They slid off the hay and ran out into the cold dew-spattered morning. The sun was well up beyond the woods of Colliam Green, and the quiet of the windless air was broken by the sound of munching cattle. Frank and Maggie were both hungry, but Cranbrook was still asleep, and it was not till they came to Swattenden that they were able to buy food. There they bought some bread and dripping, which they ate as they walked along. Neither spoke much, for their thoughts were busy. Their glorious adventure was ended, and it was time to think of the consequences.

"Perhaps they wöan't be angry wud you, Frank, now your face looks so bad."

"I don't care if they are. I've had my fun, and I'm ready to pay for it."

"Maybe you wöan't always say that."

"Why not? It's been worth it, I tell you."

Maggie did not speak.

"You're not fretting, are you?"

He looked at her closely, and saw that her eyes were swimming in tears.

"Maggie!"

"I—I'm sorry, Frank. It isn't really because I'm miserable . . . I—I'm not. Reckon it's only 'cos I'm tired and got so fritted last night."

For a moment Frank was angry with her—with her weakness, with her spirit which grieved and complained as soon as their adventure dipped from the zenith. Then suddenly he remembered that she was only a girl, weaker than he, whom he ought to take care of. It must be terrible to be a girl, to be so easily tired and cast down, to be so dependent on other people's protection and love. Consumed by a burning pity, he stopped, and took her in his arms, kissing her repeatedly and stroking her hair, and calling her his poor little Maggie.

He pitied her because she was a girl, and yet as he held her there, into his heart came something beautiful and tumultuous which was not pity. She felt such a little soft thing in his arms ; she was just a girl, helpless, weak, and sweet, and her dependence no longer made him pity her, but made him love her. He would not have her bold and upright like himself, he would rather have her like this, clinging to him in her weakness. His lips had found hers and the kiss he gave her was like none of their other kisses. For a moment she yielded, and they both trembled—then suddenly she grew shy, and pulled herself away.

" Come on quick—or we'll be late," she said.

They had reached Crit Hall, about half-way to Moon's Green. An hour later they were tramping through Standen Street, very hot and dusty and silent ; and when the first cool air puffed from the Rother into the afternoon they were crossing Wet Level towards those two sentinel oast-houses on the hill.

" Shall we go round to the back ? " asked Maggie, as they turned off the road into the drive.

" No. What 'ud be the use ? We may as well get it over as soon as possible."

Somehow he did not feel angry with her for her miserable little shuffle. It was all part of the new vision which had swept upon him in that lane by Crit Hall. He drew her trembling arm through his as he marched boldly in at the kitchen door.

Mrs. Coalbran was stooping over the fire; she turned round and anger flamed suddenly over her heavy face.

"There you are, you two young wretches! And wot have you got to say fur yourselves I'd lik to know?"

"I'm sorry," said Frank gruffly.

"Well, you can tell the Maaster that. He's got his wagon-whip out fur you. 'Twas your fäather as asked him to, surelye—so you needn't think to git off wud a whole skin."

Her anger seemed to Frank in excess of its cause. Maggie began to cry.

"Yes, you may well cry. 'Tis a pretty thing fur a maid to go spannelling about the country day and night wud a lad. Your fäather wull have summat to say to you too, I reckon."

She went to the door and cried "Coalbran!" very loud in the yard. There was an answer far away among the barns, and a few moments later Luke Coalbran came, smelling strong of linseed calf-cake.

"Well?" he said, looking sternly at the couple.

"I'm sorry," said Frank, though in a more uncertain voice. "I hope you haven't been anxious—you got my message? You knew we were all right?"

"I got your message, and"—after a pause during which he looked hard at Frank—"I knew you wur all right. But I've your fäather's leave to give you an unaccountable good hiding fur dragging my maid about the county. Haven't I, Muster?"

Frank looked round and saw his father standing in the doorway.

"Yes, indeed you have," said Rainger, whose lips were working. "Frank, your conduct has been most unseemly, and you owe us a debt of gratitude for thinking it no worse."

The boy went crimson—he suddenly remembered the dancing-booth at the Circus.

"Any one who thinks worse I'll break his head for him!" he cried in a choked voice.

Rainger muttered something incoherent about "violence" and "ingratitude"; Coalbran did not speak for a minute, then he said in a tone which seemed to have acquired an odd friendliness—

"You look as if you's had a licking already, surelye."

"I got that in the fighting booth. It's nothing. Come on, Mr. Coalbran, and give me whatever papa wants you to. I don't mind. Only let's get it over quick—I'm sleepy."

"Well, you come wud me to the stable. Maggie, stay there till I fetch you."

Maggie broke into loud sobs and Frank turned pale:

"You're not going to beat her, are you?"

"Why not? She wur as bad as you."

"She wasn't—I put her up to the whole thing. Besides, she's a girl."

"That mäakes no difference. She must täake her punishment, säum as you."

"But she mustn't. Look here, Mr. Coalbran—I—I——" a kind of desperation made him grope. "Let me take it for her—give me another licking to-morrow. I'm a boy, and I can stick it—she can't."

Coalbran shook his head slowly.

"She can stick it well enough. Döan't you meddle no furder, my lad. You can't bear a girl's trouble for her when you've led her wrong, and it's time as you larned that, Frank, I reckon."

Frank still hesitated, his mind fumbling for some way of warding off these consequences he had brought on Maggie. She must not suffer—it was all his fault. She must be spared the punishment of his misdoing. Then suddenly as he stood there and saw her weeping, decision came. He walked over to where she crouched beside the dresser, and put himself between her and Coalbran.

"You shan't touch her," he said thickly. "I shan't let you lay a finger on her. You won't let me take her punishment for her, so I shall——"

"Frank——" interrupted Maggie.

"Be quiet. I won't have you punished for my fault.

I won't have you punished for your own, neither. I'm strong enough to defend you, and I'll just about do it—so keep your hands off her, Mr. Coalbran."

"A pretty exhibition of temper," said his father. "It's hardly likely to do you or Maggie much good."

"In all my days . . ." began Mrs. Coalbran, but Luke cut her short.

"Very well," he said quietly. "Maggie, go to your bedroom and döan't let me see your face again to-night. Frank, come wud me."

Half an hour later, Maggie's loud sobs made Frank halt on the way to his room, and push open her door.

"Maggie, you mustn't cry like that. What's the good? It's all over now."

"I—I wish we'd never gone."

She was lying face downwards on the bed, sobbing into her pillow, her legs twisted and her shoulders hunched in a contraction of despair.

"But it was lovely—every bit of it, justabout lovely—except this last hour or two."

He went over to her, and tried to pull her hands down from her face.

"Go away—go away, Frank, or they'll be angry."

"But I can't go while I know you're regretting it all. If I don't regret it, why should you?"

She only sobbed more piteously for answer.

He sat down on the bed and gripped her firmly by the shoulder.

"Look here—it's been worth while. Do you understand? it's been worth while. What I've suffered I'd suffer over again if I could have the rest over again too."

"Did fäather hurt you much?"

"That be hemmed!—not as much as you're hurting me anyway—saying you wish that we'd never gone, that we'd never had the most perfect time in our lives, just because of a scolding and hiding we get when it's all over. Oh, Maggie, don't cry—don't be sorry for it all."

" Very well, I wöan't, since it mäakes you feel bad."

" That's a good girl—now I'll be off, and you'll go to sleep. We'll both go to sleep and dream of the Circus and the tents and the animals and the lanes, and everything else that was lovely. Dear little Maggie ! "

He stooped and kissed her hair, for her face was still hidden. Then he went off to his room, aching all over—except his heart, which was full of triumphant memories.

§ 12

As Frank grew older, Moon's Green sucked him closer into its life. This was not due to Maggie, for after their brief coming together again in the Cranbrook adventure, she seemed to pass out once more, to haunt the circle instead of the centre of his existence. He became, rather, part of the farm itself, the associate of the Coalbrans in their work. He soon grew to have his own appointed job in the barns—the care of the young animals was given him, and he passed his days in the midst of soft bleatings and lowings, innocent startled lives that concentrated their yearnings on milk or play. He worked under Tom Coalbran, and an odd friendship and respect sprang up between them. Tom was three or four-and-twenty, already thickly bearded, and with huge, tranquil eyes, like the beasts he loved. He spoke far more to the beasts than he spoke to Frank, but young Rainger liked him for his gentleness and his simplicity, for the brooding clumsy quiet he seemed to draw from the soil on which he laboured—the peace of the new-sown earth as it lies in brown waiting ridges under a rain-filled sky.

Frank's adventurous passion for the Kentish country was changing now into a sweet and sober intimacy. He no longer dreamed so much of distant hamlets on the Weald, flashing the sunrise from their windows or troubling the horizon-stars with their lamps at dusk, but found his romance in the fields round Moon's Green, their ploughings and harrowings and sowings and reapings, the grazing

cattle, the sheep dotting Wet Level from Ethnam to Great Knelle, the daily business of the farmyard, with the settling of bills and balancing of accounts, matings and births and deaths. For the first time he became technically interested in the farm, and his capacity grew. Moon's Green was not at all ambitious, indeed scarcely prosperous, but Frank found within its boundaries all the common stuff of life, the ultimates of that huge adventure passing down from the gods, through lovers, to the earth.

Mixed with all this routine was still a certain amount of intellectual stimulation, for he had not given up his afternoons at the Parsonage, even when he was past eighteen. But as time went by these became less and less a part of his life, more and more of an alien drill—Mr. Bellack with his Divinity and Humanities, his ancient classics and modern theologians, came to speak with a far fainter voice than Tom Coalbran, calling to the cows; just as at Moon's Green itself, "Papa" seemed less his father than Luke Coalbran with his rough commands and ready blows. Sometimes Frank scarcely knew why he clung to this shred of mental life, allowed this one little barrier to stand between himself and his associates—all he realised was that he could not let it slip, he must keep both sides of his nature alive; he must never be quite swallowed up by the farm, however much he loved it, nor allow one jot or tittle of himself to fail.

So every afternoon he tramped across half the Isle of Oxney to the Parsonage, with its fusty London reek, and construed his Virgil and cultivated his English prose style on a Latin basis, and sharpened his comfortable wits on the grindstone of the outer world, where men forget the changing seasons in changing jargons, and learn their love from the poets rather than from the stalls.

He was helped by the spasmodic presence of Richard Leigh. Richard had now left Charterhouse, and worked in London on his cousin Pauncefort's paper, while engaged in incidentally reading for the Bar. Now and then he would come down to Wittersham full of glowing tales of the gay

and glorious life he led in town, his tongue tripping with great names—Thackeray and Dickens and Currer Bell, Macaulay and Martineau, Mackay's fame, Lytton's genius, and the promise of rising stars, John Nichol and Amelia Opie. He was full of glib familiar references to men whose names Frank eyed respectfully in print—he had been to the houses of some of them and met others abroad—he had had an article accepted by *All the Year Round* and another by *Household Words*—Charles Reade had remarked to him that it was a wet evening, and he had picked up a dropped handkerchief for John Murray.

Frank listened with awe, and now and then with envy, for there were times when Richard made that glittering brain-driven world seem the real stuff of life, when he would almost send him back into the restlessness of years ago and make him ask himself if he was not indeed wasting his youth in backwater, while genius like a great mill churned up the main stream with its mighty wheel. He was caught, too, by Richard's talk of young, laughing society, parties, revels, and a drunkenness which, as he described it, seemed something flaming and adventurous, quite unlike that which Frank met soused and maudlin in the lanes on Saturday nights.

Sometimes he would ask himself if, when he became fully a man, he could do better than follow Richard's repeated suggestion and join him in London on the staff of the *Daily Post*. He could read for the Bar, and support himself meanwhile by journalism and writing. It is true that of late his private scribblings had grown more and more garrulous and inarticulate, driven about hither and thither by some uncontrollable inward force, and blown into such chaos that he no longer dared show them even to Richard—however, he judged that it would be the style he practised under Mr. Bellack's eye which would help him most. He might come to great things—both literature and the Bar lead to greatness. Anyhow it was the life his father wished for him. " Papa " might even be able to produce money from some unknown source, saved for such

a day, and help him reduce his vague general dreaming to plans practical and particular.

But against all this was his love of Moon's Green, the fields, the animals, the Coalbrans, all the dear, dull, bumpkin life of the farm. He sometimes wondered if even for fame and pleasure and adventure he could forgo the sight of the moon rising in a tawny mist some August night above the Fivewatering, or lose all chance of meeting on his November walks a grey breadth of sky leaning on a brown, wet field. . . . He felt he would not care to exchange the kindly inarticulate society of the Coalbrans for the literary and legal young men of whom Leigh was by all accounts a good average specimen—great ambitions fawning on great names. He wondered . . .

One day at Mr. Bellack's he was given a chapter of the Book of Wisdom to turn into Latin verse. Such elegant exercises were much in favour with his tutor, but Frank generally found them hateful. This afternoon he plodded discreetly for a verse or two, then leaped on and came to the lines—

"For the ungodly said, reasoning with themselves, but not aright, Our life is short and tedious, and in the death of a man there is no remedy . . . come on therefore, let us enjoy the good things that are present, let no flower of the spring pass us by: Let us crown ourselves with rosebuds before they are withered: Let none of us go without his part of our voluptuousness: let us leave tokens of our joyfulness in every place: for this is our portion, and our lot is this."

Frank's heart suddenly warmed with an admiring tenderness for these old Ungodly, who ate and drank and died. In their longing and in their choice he seemed to see his own. Thousands of years ago men had asked his questions and faced his problems; they had seen life stretch before them in a grey perplexing alley, and they had said: "Let no flower of the spring pass us by." He could not see in the Choice of the Ungodly the blasphemy which the writer imputed to it. Surely it was to glorify God for a man to leave tokens of joyfulness in every place.

He looked up, and across at Mr. Bellack. For the first time he felt impelled to take him into his confidence and consult him about his future. There had always been a certain amount of reserve between him and the parson—unaccountable, considering his affection for his tutor and his dependence on him throughout the greater part of his life for all intellectual fare ; but now he felt driven to ask him whether he ought to obey that call of youth and the spring, which urged him away from tranquillity into a larger, more dangerous, more voluptuous life : " Let us crown ourselves with rosebuds before they are withered." . . . What would the Godly say to that ?

Mr. Bellack gnawed the quill with which, while Frank ground out his verses, he had been surreptitiously writing " Paley's Evidences, a Sponge," and said—

" I don't know whether your prospects would be more utterly hopeless as a journalist or as a barrister, but I gather that is not the point."

" I should call it the point."

" Very well—it is practically useless for you to read for the Bar without either a University education or a private income."

" Some barristers have never been to a University, and as to an income I could keep myself by writing."

" You would have to make at least three hundred a year by it, which is not likely. Has Richard offered you work on the *Daily Post ?* "

" He said Mr. Pauncefort would be sure to give me some."

" Not enough for you to live on. But, seriously, Frank, that is not the point, whatever you may say. The point is, that you want a change, a new experience, and you'd go up to starve in a garret rather than stay here and thrive. If what you ask for is life, I don't mind, but if it's a livelihood you had better stay at Moon's Green."

" I want life, of course. But, sir, I reckon I don't know what life is. Sometimes I think it's staying here with my work and the animals and the country and all that ; some-

times I think it's going away to something new and quite different."

"The question is, which is the best: happiness or experience? If it's experience, you had better get out of this hole as quickly as possible; if it's happiness, you had better stay where you are."

"Which do you think it is, sir?"

"My good boy, how can I tell you? Personally I would rather you did not go to London and take your chances there, as I feel that, though you have brains and certain rudimentary gifts, it is not the kind of life you are cut out for, and that you will probably fail and be wretched. On the other hand, never renounce what seems to you a good opportunity and a fine experience, because an old chap like me hints at trouble ahead. Besides, your father would rather see you starve as a journalist than grow fat as a farmer. Perhaps he is right—perhaps I am."

"Did you ever have to make a choice of your own, sir?"

"Certainly I did, and I chose to be Rector of Wittersham with an income of two hundred a year, no congenial society, a congregation of hop-sacks, and for my sole distraction the teaching of a muddle-headed boy who, at the age of nineteen, is still undecided as to how he shall live the rest of his life."

"So you chose wrong, I reckon."

"How do you reckon any such thing? You don't know what my alternative was. Besides, you may be sure of this, no matter which way you choose you will never definitely know if you were wrong or right. The great question of all choosers and adventurers is 'Was it worth while?'—and whatever else you may expect of life, don't expect an answer to that."

§ 13

One day in April, when Frank was twenty-two, he was driving the cows home from the marsh. It was

twilight, and along Wet Level tongues of mist were creeping down the Rother from the sea. To the southward Sussex lay in wooded dimness, and in the north the hills of Kent rose almost mountainous above the lapping mist. Already Moon's Green was a mere orange blur on the vapour, except for the turrets of the oasts which rose above it and cut into the stars—pollards loomed suddenly out of the whiteness, marking the tracks of dykes woolly with fog. The grass through which Frank trod calf-deep was globed with wet and sobbed under his feet.

He was in a peaceful, drowsy mood, following without much thought the dark shapes of the cows. He was a part of Moon's Green, of the marsh and the twilight, without desire, without care, shut into his homely corner of earth, with all the ageless adventure of the stars above him—not to be reached out to or striven after, but to be turned to his own simple uses of times and seasons. He was utterly content, with the contentment which nothing but the earth seemed able to give him, as if she held in her own huge contentment the answer to all his questions and the satisfaction of all his desires.

Footsteps sounded not far off, squelching on the grass, and the next minute a man's figure gloomed out of the mist.

"Is that you, Frank?"

"Hullo, papa—I didn't expect to meet you."

As a matter of fact one never expected to meet papa during the day. He had lately grown more and more addicted to disappearance, leaving home after the early breakfast of the farm, and not coming back till supper-time, looking worn and fagged. It struck Frank that he looked doubly worn and fagged to-night, with something in his eyes that seemed to ask plaintively for interest and compassion, and he remembered with shame that he scarcely ever noticed his father's absence during the day.

"I wanted to meet you," said Rainger, walking beside him through the fog. This was even more unexpected than the meeting, for Frank had got used to the idea of his father's never wanting any one. He felt he ought to

say something about the desire being reciprocal, but the words simply would not come.

" I've been for a long walk," continued John Rainger, in his rather high-pitched plaintive voice, after a pause during which Frank was horribly conscious of unuttered words—" I've been across by Peening Quarter to Morghew, and home round by Barrow's Land. I hate the country at this time of year—it's terrible—full of suppressed life. You feel it rising up at you out of the ground and smiting down at you out of the sky "—he shuddered—" there was a little hollow full of primroses at Wassall, and the scent was so fresh and clear and faint, and young and all untrodden. . . . It drove me mad, and I lay down and rolled on them, and crushed them all—and they only smelt stronger and more sweet. My God, Frank! what a terrible thing life is!"

Frank had an uneasy suspicion that his father was drunk. He had never heard him speak like this before, and he wondered if the long fret of his existence had perhaps driven him at last to make an artificial peace. But Rainger's breath did not smell of drink, and as far as could be seen in the misty moonlight his gait was quite steady. He seemed to guess Frank's suspicion.

" I daresay you think I'm talking strangely. I've never spoken to you in this way before ; but that's more your fault than mine. I should often have liked to, but you seemed to care so little."

" Papa, don't say that. It isn't true."

" It is true. You're shy of me, because I'm so unlike you, and because I'm always here to show you what may be the end of all your hopes and big plans. But I'm going to speak to you to-night, whether you like it or not, for I've waited long enough, and I can't wait any longer now."

Frank was muddled by his father's words—he could not tell quite what he was aiming at. But at the same time a strange response sprang up in him, linking him with that morning long ago in the orchard, when he had

had his first glimpse of despair in his father's heart, and compassion in his own. He was full of pity—it seemed to well up suddenly like a spring in dry ground.

"Papa, don't be so miserable. I know I've been selfish—I'm a brute. But I—I do care, you know—only I don't understand."

The elder man did not speak for a moment, and they trod on side by side through the wet grass, behind the lumbering shapes of the cows, towards the orange patch that Moon's Green kitchen window made on the fog. At last he said—

"It's only natural for you to feel as you do. You're young and vigorous and ambitious, and I'm the skeleton always beside you to tell you how youth and vigour and ambition may end some day. I was once all that you are now, and I planned much the same as you planned—and look how I have ended."

"You haven't ended—don't say that. There's time for you to be happy still."

"Not now—I've lost the way."

"Oh, sir, don't talk like this—you make me feel as if I was to blame, and I'm sure I am. But I thought you really didn't want me."

"And yet when you were a little chap, how often I used to take you into my arms and kiss you."

Frank did not speak, remembering his attitude under those caresses.

Suddenly his father asked—

"Do you ever think of your mamma?"

"Not often, sir. You see I was such a little fellow when she died."

"Died? Oh yes, but that was five years later. Didn't you know that she had left me?"

"I thought she was dead."

"I wanted you to think that, but I expected you would have found out the truth by this time. Perhaps it was a pity I spoke—I might have left her unreproached in your memory."

Frank had nothing to say. Somehow this new aspect of mamma was not much of a blow or a surprise. It seemed now a very unimportant matter that she had run away with Mr. Bellamy—conjecture unhesitatingly supplied the name. But he saw that his father was trembling. "I—I'm sorry, sir. You must have suffered horribly."

Rainger gave a dry, coughing laugh.

"Yes—I 'suffered horribly.' That's quite right. I thought I'd learn to forget her if I buried myself down here, but it only made matters worse. You see the country is so full of life, and it was life that I wanted to get away from—it had hurt me so. I was a fool. Three thousand years ago a man asked: 'Whither shall I go then from Thy Spirit, or whither shall I go then from Thy Presence? If I climb up into heaven, Thou art there; if I go down to hell, Thou art there also. If I take the wings of the morning and remain in the uttermost parts of the sea' . . ."

He broke off, his voice thick. "It's no use. There's no escape. Life is everywhere, avenging—and it never forgives a traitor. I forsook it, so now it will destroy me. It has tracked me down, and at last it has got me. I thought I'd hide myself from it here, buried in peace—and I meet it in every blade of grass, in every leaf, every fly. Oh, my God, make an end——"

"Don't, sir—don't . . ."

Rainger checked himself, and looked at Frank almost tenderly.

"I mustn't make you unhappy, and what better warning can you have than my example? There, there—we've done. All I ask you is always to think kindly of your poor mamma and of me."

There were tears in Frank's throat.

"I promise you, papa, I'll never think ill of mamma because of what you've told me, and as for you, I'll try to be a better son to you; I'd like to come with you sometimes for your walks, if you'll let me, and we might read together in the evenings. . . ."

"Here we are at Moon's Green," said his father.

§ 14

For some time that night, before going to sleep, Frank thought of his father. That strange encounter in the mist disturbed him—there had been something unnatural and wild about papa. Was he going mad? It was quite possible that his melancholy nature, driven into itself to feed on its own troubles, might lead him to madness. Frank's conscience reproached him—he ought to have been a better son. Because in his childhood papa had bored him, he had somehow shaken him off and made himself a life from which he was shut out. What a relief it might have been to his father to have some one to talk to about mamma, for instance. If Frank had not been so obstinately remote and shy that bursting heart might have eased itself by confidence, whereas it was now half consumed by its own suppressed fires. The boy made up his mind to be a more loving son, to offer a tardy interest and companionship. He hoped that it would not be too late—that papa's mind was not already unhinged. He tossed to and fro in his bed, making plans of devotion. Then suddenly health and hard work proved stronger than a guilty conscience, and he fell sound asleep.

He woke at about one, with the sensation that he had been roused by some outside noise. He thought he heard his door shutting. Then he abruptly became conscious that his father was in the room.

"Papa" he called, sitting up in bed. There was no answer, no movement in the cold darkness. "Are you there, sir?"

He could hear the ticking of a clock somewhere down in the house, and the sound rattled hollow and sinister in the stillness. Hardly knowing what he did, he slipped out of bed and groped for his trousers, for he had come to share the roughness of the young Coalbrans, and had no light in his bedroom. The uncurtained window was now showing as a grey square, punctured by a single

star, for the mists did not reach as high as the gables of Moon's Green. He was quite sure that his father had been in the attic, and had, moreover, an odd baffling conviction that the door he had heard shut had been shut at his coming in, not at his going out. Still, there was obviously no one in the room, and Frank realised that his teeth were clacking together, not merely from cold. He fumbled open his door, and came out on the ladder-like stairs that led down to the first landing.

The passage was full of mist, which had drifted in at an open window. It was damp, and deadly chill. He slid his hands along the wall, where the moisture lay smeared and cold, till he found his father's door. It was ajar.

"Papa," he called faintly.

There was no answer. The room was full of whorls of mist, for here was the open window which had given it entrance, and it came rolling in, thick, and cold on the lips with the taste of night. When Frank at last struck tinder and lit a candle, it was a mere yellow smudge on the white sea, and he had to hold it down quite close to the bed before he saw that it was empty.

It had not even been slept in. He moved about the room, holding the candle into the corners, against chairs, against the writing-table. Everything was quite orderly, with a barren, lifeless look about it, as if the room had not been inhabited for weeks instead of hours. Meantime the terror in Frank's heart grew, and it was almost forcing itself into his throat, into a call for help, when he heard a movement close at hand, and the next moment Luke Coalbran was in the room, wrapped in a blanket.

"Mus' Rainger—do you want anything?"

"It's me, Master," said Frank. "My father's gone. I don't know where he is."

"Gone?" repeated Luke, and took the light from Frank's cold hand.

He looked round the room as if he distrusted the boy's eyes. Then he mumbled in his beard—

"Gone sure enough, I reckon."

" But where can he be ? He can't be out on a night like this. Look—his bed hasn't even been slept in."

Coalbran shook his head.

" I'll go and git the boys up. Then we'll look around fur un."

He tramped off with the light, leaving Frank in the cold mist-coiled room. The lad stood for a moment, feeling stupid and half awake. Then his terror came back, like the drag of a nightmare, and he dashed out of the room, obsessed by the feeling that if he did not leave it then he would be stopped. He hurried down the passage to where the Coalbran boys were yawning into their clothes, and in the warm, human-smelling closeness of their room found a gap of comfort.

Soon they were ready, and they all clumped downstairs, striking lights, and talking in low voices. Passing through the kitchen, they found another wall of mist in the room beyond, for the back door stood ajar, and the woolly raw-smelling fog had come in and piled itself in the outer kitchen.

" He's gone out," said Frank, and called despairingly into the yard : " Papa ! "

" Maybe he's on the marsh."

" Or gone up on the Isle."

" Perhaps he's gone to Parson's."

A search seemed pretty hopeless, but Frank was desperate, and the Coalbrans willing. They climbed down the steep, slippery field to the Level, from time to time shouting and waving their lanterns. It was impossible to see more than a yard or two ahead, and the mist seemed to wrap their voices round and choke them back into their throats. But they would not give up the search, for the same fear was upon them all, and without any word or consultation they were making for the White Dyke.

In the darkness it was impossible to see the water, though they could hear it lapping against the reeds. There was something cloaking and sinister about the marsh, its smells and sounds were all of water, and water, drench-

ing and oozing, was the only sensation it had to give. It was as if the materialised spirit of drowning was abroad—the air was full of gurglings and suckings, strange chokings, tricklings, drippings, and over all the clammy strangle of the fog, filling mouth and throat and nostrils, ears and pores with the emanations of water.

Gradually a light began to break—a fan of whiteness in the sky above Baron's Grange, slowly pouring itself upon the mist, and showing blots of pollards and streaks of brooks. The mist itself began to pill and scatter, and the lanterns cast red flames into the unveiled waters of the dyke. Frank could shout no longer, and even the Coalbrans were silent, splashing through the grass and land-growing reeds, every now and then holding their lanterns down into the hollow of the stream.

The dawn spread and brightened, but remained strangely colourless, sending only white and grey lights over the marsh. The whole scene was limned in grey and black and white—the grey marsh, with the white scattering mists, the blackness of the water as it flowed and moaned under the stooping bulrushes and flag-reeds. Far away the hills of Kent and Sussex loomed up from the level, grey fading to black, with balls and rags of mist drifting and dwindling along their slopes.

They had followed the dyke nearly as far as its junction with the Reading Sewer, and their lanterns were mere yellow, rayless spots, drowned in the dawn, when suddenly Tom Coalbran called out, and pointed into the dyke a little way ahead. Something dark was there, which as they came nearer divided and showed itself as two distinct objects—two feet.

A pair of boots, draggled with green weed, stuck up grotesquely above the water, which sank from them with the ebbing tide. The four men stood silently and stared at them as they protruded. John Rainger must have plunged head first into the stream and stuck head first in the fathom of mud that lined its bottom. His feet showed more and more as the tidal current dropped, till at last a piece of shank appeared.

§ 15

For some days Frank was completely broken. The Coalbrans were surprised to see how hard he took his father's death, considering how little attention he had paid him when he was alive. The boy went about with a drawn, haggard face, and would sit for hours with his head between his hands, his shoulders cowering as if under a blow.

Frank could never efface the memory of that dawn, of that pale creeping light, brightening to reveal the uttermost horror. Whenever he shut his eyes he could see those two protruding feet, forlorn, grotesque, familiar, dreadful. It seemed as if even in death, life had had his father in derision, and denied him even that mock majesty which comes to the body when the spirit is gone.

For the first time Frank saw something terrible in life. Life with its cruel ironies, its collapses, its stalking revenges, struck him now as ruthless, almost a thing to shun. The glow of its adventures was rubbed out by the darkness of its betrayals. The star-stuff which builds Orion and the Pleiades also makes those black metallic worlds which bump dead about chaos, flaring up only when combustion or collision bursts them into ruin. Life had tortured his father, and yet had never forgiven him for seeking to escape from the iron and lash. It had followed him, avenging, into his refuge, routed him out and hunted him down. And he, Frank, had been a part of that cruel, relentless life—all that there was in him of youth and vigour and health had joined with life against his father, had helped to trample on his weakness, to quench the smouldering tow and stamp out the feeble spark. He was linked with all that was cruel and just and inevitable and destroying and unpitying in the world—he, whose heart had swelled big with pity, whose mind had formed a hundred plans of tenderness. He was just an unwilling part of a relentless whole, one of the lusty, merciless forces of existence, till he, too, should in his turn become old and weak and a failure, to be trampled on by others.

He conceived a morbid horror of the things he had once loved—the fields and woods and lanes of the Isle of Oxney—for he knew they were merely another, more favourable aspect, of that sinister, sucking marsh, where his father had perished. Nature, in spite of sown fields, and apple dragged orchards, was cruel as life. Life and Nature were one cruelty and equity. Neither knew how to spare or to forgive. When the spring sun glowed on the walls of Moon's Green, charming out the smell of the old bricks, with fugitive scents like honey in the creepers, Frank thought only of the choking, gurgling, sucking, whining marsh, where mist and water had hidden the grotesqueness of his father's last tragedy—he felt that the marsh was the real face of Nature, the sun-spotted orchard only an appearance or fetch . . . as devils can appear as angels. . . .

For each man varies the time when he is roused out of boyhood into adolescence, but the cause of awakening, when that is sudden and more than the process of growth, varies little—it is nearly always the loss of that trust in life which is characteristic of all young, normal creatures. When a boy begins to doubt his life, he has ceased to be a boy. Frank now doubted his life most passionately. His awakening had come later than it comes to most ; he was now twenty-two, when many a young fellow in the Isle of Oxney had married and settled down. But it was not till now, when the horror and mockery of his father's death had struck him full on the heart, that he suddenly found he was "grown up," that his boyhood with its dreams and ignorance, with its innocent trust in fate, was gone, and had left him—not a man, for a man takes many years to make, but an adult, questioning, disillusioned and distrustful. A great gulf seemed fixed between him and the days when his thoughts had been full of his work at Moon's Green and at the Parsonage, with no bigger problem than whether he should go to London a year or so hence or stay in the country. Now his mind seemed full of chaos, fire, uncertainties, and he no longer asked himself how he should live his life, but whether life itself was worth

living, since it turned on a man and crushed him at the last. He recalled some words Mr. Bellack had once quoted, though why and when he could not remember: "Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder."

§ 16.

The funeral was on a typical April day, with sudden snorting showers, followed by wistful spreads of sunshine, while the primroses scented the damp lanes through which John Rainger's coffin bumped in a farm-cart—after the coroner's jury had brought in a verdict of "Suicide while temporarily insane." He could not roll on the primroses now, to crush out their mocking sweetness, as he had done at Wassall; but perhaps a few had been uprooted for the digging of his grave.

Frank walked behind as chief mourner, with crape weepers on his hat. During the service he found himself standing next Maggie. Her presence gave him a sort of comfort which that of the other Coalbrans could not, kind as they were—Tom was even crying. Once he put out his hand and touched hers, which hung red and coarse at her side against her black skirt; and once, when the Parson said, "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust," he sidled against her, as if he wanted the reassurance of her warmth and life. He found his heart turning towards Maggie, and he remembered their escapade to Cranbrook as something glorious, as one thing at least that life had given him and could not take away. He found that he had forgotten the blows and the humiliations in which it ended—and suddenly he realised that he would forget these, too, and perhaps all the blows that life had to give him. He had, indeed, grown up, for he could see the passing of a present emotion. It gave him a queer pleasure, a restoration of confidence. For might not the day come when he could look back on the whole of his life as he now looked back on Cranbrook Circus—an adventure more than justified?

"We give thee hearty thanks that it hath pleased thee to deliver this our brother out of the miseries of this sinful world. . . ."

The shower had passed, still hanging on the leaves, where the globes were caught in a burst of the late afternoon sunlight. A rainbow slowly reached up from Chapel Bank and hooped across the Isle of Oxney, while blackbirds trilled and gurgled to each other in the frothed plum trees beyond the churchyard wall. Away at Harlakenden a girl's voice called the cows up from the marsh—"Come höame—come höame," and the wind brought the bleating of lambs and the scent of may from the Kent Ditch.

A kind of exaltation came over Frank. A great load seemed lifted from his heart. Standing by his father's grave he saw life as a huge drumming march, splendid, over-running, overpowering. Only he who was afraid was lost. He was no longer afraid. He saw the darkness and the terror, but no longer cowered before them. Life should be to him a Cranbrook Circus, "worth while" in spite of its penalties. He could have shouted for joy, there by his father's grave. He turned to Maggie, and drew very close to her, taking her hand.

"Maggie, I love you," he whispered.

§ 17

The day after the funeral Mr. Bellack called at Moon's Green, and told Frank that his father had left him three hundred pounds, all the money he had in the world. To young Rainger this seemed a fortune, and he was surprised to hear that Mr. Bellack considered it poverty. What was he going to do? Luke Coalbran had offered to keep him on at Moon's Green, if he would help with the work as hitherto. On the other hand, three hundred pounds would set him up in Australia or America, if he wished to try his luck out there.

But Frank had a third alternative. That very morning he had had a letter from Richard Leigh, inviting him to

take this chance to break free from rusticity and come up to London : " Cousin Pauncefort quite approves the idea, and I daresay he would give you some reviewing to do, or occasionally a middle article. You are a fool if you let your gifts stagnate in that Kentish hole. You have style and imagination, and require only practice and opportunity to make you an accomplished writer."

Frank did not really believe that, but the call of the new life was insistent, all the same. His choice had come far earlier than he had expected, but also it was far easier. Mr. Bellack's suggestions offered doubtless greater happiness and prosperity ; but he felt now more strongly than ever that he could not settle down even to the life he loved without having seen more of life as a whole, pried into novelties, rifled secrets, had his part of voluptuousness like the wise Ungodly.

" When I'm old," he said to Mr. Bellack, " then it'll be time to settle down."

" It would hardly be settling down if you went overseas."

" But I don't want to spend my life farming. It's hard to explain, sir, but though I like farming I feel I want to have a try at something quite different first. If I thought of what would make me happiest, I reckon I'd stay here, and maybe—marry, and pass my days working and walking and breathing the fresh air. But I feel I must see what other things there are about. When I die I don't want to feel I've known only one little corner of life, however comfortable it was."

" In a word, you're an inquisitive, restless young beggar, and this plan of going to London and living a life for which you are totally unfit, is merely because you want to poke round and taste and touch and handle a few forbidden things before you agree with your own secret conviction that home's best."

" I don't know that it's forbidden things I want. I want life and experience, and I never heard yet that they were forbidden."

"Do you never read your Bible, you young heathen? Have you never heard of the forbidden fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, which is exactly what you're hankering after now? Well, well—take and eat, but remember that the first result of being 'as gods' is that you are turned out of Paradise."

"I reckon it 'ud have been precious dull for Adam and Eve if they'd always stayed in Eden—much better for them to come out and work and have children and know good and evil."

"All the same you must acknowledge that such is a disappointing consequence of being 'as gods.' They naturally expected something better—and I'm afraid you do."

"You and my father, sir, who chose different from what I'm choosing—do you think you make me want to follow your example? What have you got from burying yourselves down here? My father killed himself, and you are——"

"Leading a life of genteel, bookish seclusion, and generally helping my fellow-men by christening, marrying, and burying them. I don't suppose you'll ever do anything half so useful."

"I daresay not, sir. But perhaps when I'm your age——"

"You'll be dead, worn out with exertion and disappointment. Oh, would-be god, remember the conditions of your godhead—'In the sweat of thy brow,' and 'in sorrow . . .'"

His voice had suddenly risen to passion from the friendly scoffing of his general argument. He checked himself, almost as if ashamed.

"I shan't preach to you, Frank. After all your poor father would have preferred to see his money go to support you as a bad writer than to start you as a good farmer. I know if you find you've chosen wrong, you'll be too plucky to whine over it. That's all I ask. For I'm beginning to think that your father's sin was, not cowardice, but regret."

§ 18

The Coalbrans were disappointed with Frank's decision, but said nothing against it, except Maggie, who cried. Since the day of the funeral, she and Frank had been rather shy of each other, dropping their eyelids in each other's presence, and fumbling with their hands. Once or twice they had met in the twilight, and then he had clipped her to him and kissed her, but the next moment been as shy of her as ever. Since that whispered outburst by his father's grave, he had never spoken again of love. His thoughts were all confused with regard to her. His hitherto baffling plans were now simple enough, but Maggie, who had always been just Maggie, had become something mysterious and unaccountable, the unanswered question of his life. His feeling for her was entirely different from the easy comradeship of past years, or even that sweet passionate instinct of protection which had come to him on the tramp home from Cranbrook Circus. She did nothing to help him in his uncertainty. There was something about her that was strangely unwilling, though at the same time he felt that she would never let him go.

When he saw her cry at the announcement of his departure, he was touched and troubled.

" Maggie," he said, meeting her as she came out at dusk to feed the chickens with meal and sharps—" you mustn't think that because I'm leaving you, I'm going for ever : I shall come back."

She thrust her hand into the chicken-food, and scattered it, without answering him.

" You know I love you, Maggie ? "

" You've töald me."

" I'm only going away because I want to see life before I settle down. I shouldn't go if I didn't mean to come back."

" Maybe you'll come back, maybe you wöan't."

" I tell you I *will* come back."

" Coop—coop—coop," called Maggie sharply to some stragglers.

"I shall write to you often, and you must write to me."

"I äun't a scholard."

"But you can just write 'I love you, Frank.' That's all I want."

"Why shud I write 'I love you, Frank,' when you'll be away among all the fine ladies, and wöan't be loving me no more?"

"Maggie, Maggie! You naughty little Maggie!"

There was no one in the yard, and he put his arm round her, pulling her against him, while the pail clanked against their legs, and her hand, full of chicken meal, was crushed against his side.

"I love you, little dear. I shall always love you, whatever I am, wherever I go. Remember that, Maggie."

"I'll remember you said it, anyway."

"Why do you doubt me?—it's cruel."

She began to cry.

"I döan't doubt you, Frank—but I doubt things. Oh, I feel as things 'ull go hard wud us, loving lik this. After all, you're a gentleman born and I'm only a farmer's girl. You're going away to your own life, and I just-about hate you going, surelye. Maybe you wöan't be able to come back to me, however much you want it. Oh, Frank, I've a feelin' as things 'ull go agäunst us."

For a moment, as he held her there, he wavered, almost abandoned the choice he had made. The sky was dull cobalt, paling to green above the humping thatch of the barns—a big yellow moon drifted into it from beyond the orchard . . . his nostrils were sweet with Maggie's fragrance of milk and chicken meal and her warm sweet flesh under her cotton gown and her hair uncoiled on her shoulder, with twigs in it from the currant-bushes. . . . He wavered, but the moment passed, and he was steady. Not even for Maggie could he stand away from life and experiment and experience. After all, she was little more than an unanswered question, an unfulfilled desire. He loved her, but—it was not love that he wanted now; it was life.

He gently put her from him.

" I'll come back," he said, " but I won't stay now. It wouldn't do—for either of us. I'm not ready—you're not ready. But you mustn't be afraid of things, for nothing can really take you from me. Oh, I'd come to you from the ends of the earth. . . ."

He caught her back to him, and for the first time since that far-away moment in the lane by Crit Hall, his mouth was on her mouth.

The moon swam up towards the zenith, and the stars mocked those two poor lovers kissing among the barns. . . .

PART II

THE WISE UNGODLY

§ 1.

ON a June afternoon, Frank arrived at London Bridge Station, dazed, shaken, and train-sick after his first railway journey. His sides ached with the jolting of the wooden third-class carriage, and his face was dark with the grime and smoke which had poured over the roofless top. He wore what he thought a most elegant new suit, which, however, proved very different from that in which Leigh stood arrayed, making Frank doubt for the first time the taste and wisdom of the Tenterden clothier from whom he had bought his outfit.

"Hullo!" cried Richard, "here you are at last. Got your box—oh, is that it? Now let me introduce you to my friend Irons; you're in digs with him, you know."

Frank shook hands with a young man slightly shorter and sturdier than Leigh, and then prepared to swing his box up on his shoulder.

"Oh, I say," said Richard, "hadn't you better have a porter?"

"It's nothing," said Frank, standing stout and upright under his tin box. Two ladies passed; one looked at him admiringly, and the other sniggered.

"But—er—it's more usual to have a porter, you know. Might look a bit noticeable if you carried your own luggage."

Frank submitted to having his box taken from him by a grinning porter at his elbow, and the three young men followed it out of the station.

Young Rainger marvelled at the huge smoking arch of the station, with its wreaths of steam and fog—pierced by the high, toothed funnels of the engines. He had never seen so many people together before, even at Tenterden Market. He kept on bumping into them and stopping to make apologies which they did not wait to hear. In the end, Richard took him by the arm, guiding him through the unaccustomed crowd, into a still bigger crowd outside the station, where the yellowish smoke seemed to hang nearly as thickly as inside, with a close smell of dust and hot pavements, and everywhere a confused rattle and shouting.

They got into a cab, and drove off over the cobble-stones, across London Bridge and up Cheapside towards Holborn. Frank hung out of the window, partly in hopes of breathing some fresh air, partly to appreciate the marvels through which he was travelling. His naïve wonder delighted Leigh and Irons, who were already inclined to regard him as a "cure," whose vagaries would provide endless amusement to their set, with, moreover, the possible excitement of finding genius hidden under country clothes and an unsophisticated manner.

Irons lodged in Bury Street, among the attics, with a peep from his window at the new British Museum, already grimed as if with the smoke of centuries. There was a small, not uncheerful study, with a bedroom leading out of it, and in the elbow of the stairs another minute room where Frank was to sleep.

Richard stayed only for a drink.

"You're coming round to me after dinner," he said to Frank. "Irons will bring you."

"I thought we were going to the Simons'," said Irons.

"Oh, that'll do for another night. I should like him to see my place. Besides, I want to discuss plans. Good-bye, my boy; you look as if you needed a good sleep." This last to Frank, who sat staring abstractedly at his beer-mug, his hair rumpled, his forehead moist. Irons good-naturedly suggested that he should go to his bedroom and rest a

bit—" For you'll want to be in your best form at Leigh's. I expect every one will be there."

Leaving Frank to conjecture uneasily as to the nature of this mysterious Everyone, he buried himself in a pile of books and papers at the other end of the table, and Rainger, still feeling tired and sick, went off to his room.

Now his box had been set down by the bed, there was hardly room to stand. The bed was covered with a faded quilt, that was supposed to match the curtains, which had, however, faded a shade paler still and added a yellowish tint to their dingy rose. The other furniture consisted of a chest of drawers with a jug and basin on the top, and a row of pegs on the wall. There was also a chair with a hole in the cane seat.

Frank's heart sank. He was not used to luxury, or even to comfort, but there was something here very different from the sweet-smelling bareness of his attic at Moon's Green. A tide of home-sickness swept over him and seemed to draw his heart out after it. He felt as if he could not live in this dingy, stuffy, cramped room, with its hideous furniture and yellow wall-paper. He would die if he did not have fresh air to breathe and green to see.

Then he noticed a square of filmy sunshine on the wall, and his heart suddenly quieted and warmed. It seemed to transfigure the room, even though it cast no chequer of leaves upon the floor and drew out no sweet decays of lath and apples. He turned and looked out of the window, and saw a wonderful view of chimney-pots.

They grew like a forest all round him, some standing out darkly against the bright sky, others bathed in the glow, and displaying their reds and yellows, under the warm smear of smoke. Some were straight, most were crooked, full of unexpected twists and angles, jutting out strange elbows. Some were smokeless, from others poured dark yellowish clouds, and others were oddly cowled, the cowls whining and groaning as they moved in the dust-smelling wind. Under them heaped roofs of every con-

ceivable colour and shape—slates and tiles, reds, blues and browns, steeps, leads and gables, some broken with skylights or humped into attic windows, all misty in the wan London sunshine, with its woof of smoke.

Frank gazed for some minutes open-mouthed at this new landscape. He found himself strangely liking it—he felt as if in time it might come to mean the same to him as that stretch of water-coursed level and wood-ragged hill which he saw from his window at home. London was not all ugliness, but had its own beautiful things, which were perhaps not so different as they seemed from the beautiful things of Kent. . . .

He turned to the bed, and lying down on it, was soon fast asleep.

§ 2.

At five o'clock Frank dined with Irons, their dinner consisting of chops, potatoes, bread-and-cheese, and a pint of wine. He was not used to dining at that hour, and the wine, which he hardly touched, made him feel dazed and swimmy. Still he was growing more reconciled to his new life ; he had slept off his fatigue and headache, and some of his home-sickness too, and was able to look forward to the experiences and adventures with which he expected his way to be strawed.

Besides, he liked Stephen Irons, who was more simple and affable than Leigh, and delighted to have a companion in the attics of Bury Street. Irons had always lived in London, more or less precariously. Now he was working chiefly at translations, though he wrote at intervals for the *Daily Post*, and sent tentative articles to *Fraser's Magazine*, *All the Year Round* and *Punch*. *Fraser's Magazine* provided a link with Frank's early memories, and Irons was naïvely surprised to hear he was a gentleman's son and came of literary stock.

" Leigh made out you were a sort of ploughboy genius, you know—wrote poems on stones and essays on the bark

of trees. I'd no idea you had a governor who worked for *Fraser's.*"

"I don't know that he worked very much—and of course I've always lived down in the Isle of Oxney. I reckon I'm very different from you writing fellows in some ways."

"M'yes"—Irons was not sure how far he might go in criticism—"one could tell you came from the country, you know. Look here, if I were you, I'd stick to the inspired-ploughboy legend—hold your tongue about that literary dad of yours; he'll only spoil the impression."

At six o'clock they set out for Leigh's rooms in Gower Street. These were far more elegant and aristocratic than Irons's, though at the top of nearly as many stairs. There was a carpet on the study floor, and the furniture was Richard's own, with all the voluptuous outlines that fashion decreed.

Some five or six young men were in the room, and during the next half-hour as many more arrived. Frank noticed that they were all dressed like Leigh in long tight trousers and coats that clipped them at the waist—and they all wore a lot of hair on their faces, not beards like the Coalbrans, but long drooping whiskers. He felt clumsy and alien with his Tenterden suit and shaven cheeks, though he noticed that his clothes were of better quality than many of more fashionable cut, which were often shoddy and threadbare.

Richard introduced him to every one, but Frank found he had very little to say. He felt that he would spend the evening most profitably in listening to the others, noting their tastes and shibboleths. The air was soon dense with smoke, for as each man came in he pulled out a pipe which seemed bigger than the last one and asked for a light. Frank did not smoke—neither of the young Coalbrans did, though Luke occasionally had a pipe in the evenings. Leigh did his best to tempt him, but Frank was convinced that his beginnings had best be private. He sat in the unsympathetic corner of a tapestried settee, his eyes wide

open like a child's in strange surroundings, eager for the expected feast of talent and wit.

At first it was rather disappointing—Richard's friends had jokes among themselves, and allusions to common acquaintances of which Frank could make nothing. Besides, they had a disconcerting habit of talking several at a time. The country-bred boy, used to long silences and slow, single voices, was bewildered by the babble and uproar, the loud, frequent laughter, the oaths, the interruptions. There were bottles of wine in the fender, and every now and then one of these would be opened and passed round. Frank hated the acid taste of the Burgundy, and seldom did more than put his lips to the glass, though he was too shy, and too tender of Leigh's feelings, to refuse to drink altogether.

After a time the conversation simplified itself by the expedient of one or two young men who had the loudest voices talking down the rest. A poet with a huge projecting mouth like a monkey's read, " Louisa, or a Mother's Heart," and another recited an " Ode on the Death of William Wordsworth," of which he had forgotten the end. Some one asked Frank if he had brought a manuscript with him, and as he had brought two, under the mistaken idea that he was going to " discuss plans " with Richard, he blushed and stammered, and was finally forced into reading, " Defoe and the English Novel," his other manuscript—" The Road from Northiam to Lomas "—being for Richard's eye alone. He was listened to with boredom and respect, and in the end his style was praised, but he was told that he must cultivate a brisker manner.

" I can trace Uncle Bellack's hand in that, ' said Richard ; " next time bring us some stuff that's quite your own. He's got two distinct styles," he added, turning to the company ; " you've just had an example of one—which of course might do for reviewing or a little polite drivel just to fill up space ; the other's quite different, rough and original, rather like George Borrow. Can't you sport a little, Rainger ? "

Frank shook his head, fingering guiltily at his breast pocket.

"Talking of George Borrow," broke in a youth with long, fair hair, and a moustache in addition to the regulation whiskers, "don't you think *Lavengro* too intolerable for words? One had hoped for something after *The Bible in Spain*, but lor! that unbaked, conceited, vulgar babble! . . . I hope your friend's work isn't like that, Richard."

"I don't call *Lavengro* so bad," said a dark, hawk-faced man, a little older than the rest. "Cut out the philology, and you've a manly and uncommon piece of work, which at all events seems written from the heart."

"But, my dear Weston, there is such a thing as elegance——"

"And there is such a thing as boredom—and I find they generally go together."

"Elegance is going out of fashion nowadays," said a stout young fellow with a meerschaum. "There's precious little of it in Currer Bell, who appears to be all the rage just now. And have you seen that book by a sister of hers, which has just been republished, because, forsooth! it didn't attract enough attention when it first appeared? I had it given me by Winkworth to review, and though I couldn't be bothered to read it I hear it's the crudest stuff—worse than Currer at her most outlandish."

"That always comes when women write books," said the hairy young man. "They're so frightened of being called feminine that they bury what talent they may have under a mountain of manliness—and manliness for them consists entirely of oaths and violence and scarlet sin."

"Currer Bell thinks she knows a monstrous lot about life."

"I've heard on very good authority that she's Thackeray's mistress."

"My dear chap, what nonsense! If she'd had one half-hour's conversation with Thackeray she could not have written *Jane Eyre*."

"Weston's god!" jibed the Meerschaum. "I tell you,

man, in fifty years' time your god will be buried and forgotten."

"On the contrary, he's more likely to be god of gods."

"Gammon! Thackeray will never live—he's too cynical, too superficial. Now, Dickens has really got hold of human nature."

"There is less human nature in the whole of *Pickwick* than in one sentence of *Vanity Fair*. Dickens sees men only from the outside—he never once goes further than the skin."

"Well, Thackeray doesn't get further than their clothes. Look at *Pendennis*."

"I wanted *Pendennis* to review," said Leigh, "but Pauncefort's given it to young Adams, who now, I think, hears of Thackeray for the first time."

"The fact is," said the monkey-faced poet with the mother's heart, "that neither Dickens nor Thackeray will live; indeed, I would swear that no modern British writer will live—the future of the novel is in America."

There were derisive cries of "Oh!"

Monkey-face grew crimson.

"What about *Uncle Tom's Cabin?*" he spluttered.

"Well, what about it? It's an anti-slavery tract which makes me wish we'd never wasted any time abolishing the slave-trade."

"It's a clear-sighted, disinterested, human, uplifting, noble book," panted Monkey-face.

"Then let them keep it in America—we're not good enough for it over here."

"We haven't enough rubbish of our own, so the Yankees must needs void themselves upon us—as if Longfellow wouldn't do for one century."

"We've no poet to match him."

"What about Tennyson?"

"Not a patch on him."

"Oh! Oh!"

Frank sat nervously clutching his glass, his head aching with the smoke and noise, his mouth sour with the taste

of wine. He wondered if all " literary " gatherings were like this, with wit and intellect no less diluted. As time went on the talk grew more and more confusing. One young man, whose behaviour was not quite uninfluenced by the bottles in the fender, said that the future of the English novel lay with Florence Marryat. Some agreed with him, others disagreed, and some one cried—

" What about Rita Simons ? "

" Rita's a dear girl," said Irons, " but she'll never make a novelist—she's too human."

" Is that a disadvantage ? I should have thought the opposite."

" But she's too much interested in other people's work."

Richard leaned across Weston, and touched Frank on the knee.

" That's some one you must meet—Rita Simons," he said.

" I—I should like to," stammered Frank, uncertain of his tongue.

" She's always enormously interested in the younger men, in the coming people," continued Leigh, " and she may be able really to help you."

" I should be much obliged."

" I'll take you round there to-morrow. Meantime I'd go home to bed if I were you—you look devilish blue about the gills."

Frank, who was far too shy to have left of his own accord, was glad of this permission to escape. He whispered his intention to Irons, and with a hurried good-bye to Leigh, slipped out unnoticed in the midst of a furious discussion on Macaulay's chances of survival in a world of American novelists.

§ 3

The next day Frank was heavy-eyed and listless. Irons was astonished to find a man whom he supposed to have been used to spend his days tramping furrows and shoulder-

ing burdens, tired out after one evening's very moderate dissipation.

"It was the air," said Frank. "I could hardly breathe, and all that talk seemed to buzz round and round in my head."

"Talk! It was nothing last night—Masters wasn't there, or De Coven. You should hear *them* talk! They'd make you buzz!"

"It may have been partly the wine."

"You never drank any—I don't think your glass was filled up once. We must make a man of you."

Frank felt insulted. Man indeed! He was as much a man as that Irons with his flabby white hands and elegant clothes. Was his manhood to be measured by pipes and pints of wine? He experienced a sudden reaction from his adventure. This wonderful new life seemed to put a horrid taste into a fellow's mouth of a morning. His tongue was all dry and furred, his eyes felt weak. Then suddenly he saw where lay the sting of Irons's words. He did not feel a man—that was it—not half a man. His weariness was something quite different from the healthy fatigue which came after his labours at Moon's Green—it was gross, stuffy, irritable, jangling. . . . He found himself craving for the long luxurious ache of sweating limbs. Lord! He'd rather plough the whole of the Steep Field than sit one evening listening while fools talked. A sudden rush of home-sickness drove him from the breakfast-table, with its unaccustomed kidneys and muffins, to his cupboard of a bedroom and its chimney-pot landscape.

Irons routed him out at eleven, and took him round to the *Daily Post* offices in Fleet Street. Here he saw Leigh and Mr. Pauncefort. The latter told him quite plainly that he was not experienced enough for the *Post*, but he was willing to try him on one or two minor papers issued from the same office. He might do a little reviewing, or a topical article now and then. One of these papers was of a religious nature, and to-day there was to be some daring religious service at St. Barnabas, Pimlico. They wanted

an account of it for *Home Sermons*, so if Rainger would go off there at once and let him have the report in time for next week's issue . . .

Utterly bewildered, Frank found himself going downstairs with Leigh and Irons.

" Cheer up," said Richard ; " I can tell by his manner he's interested in you. You'll be on the *Post* soon enough."

" But I don't see what I'm to do. I know nothing about Church matters."

" Never heard of the Tractarians ? "

" I've heard of them, but I know very little about them."

" I suppose Uncle Bellack hasn't got Roman fever yet. Look here, old man, this is what you've got to do. Irons and I will put you into the right omnibus, and you'll go off straight to St. Barnabas and take notes during the service. Then you'll come home and we'll help you write 'em out."

It seemed a tame beginning to a literary career—to drive off in an omnibus to church ; but Frank was too bewildered for protest. He was still further bewildered by his first High Church service, and quite forgot to take any notes in the exotic strangeness of his surroundings. All dazed with lights and music and cloth-of-gold, he finally stumbled out into midday sunshine, and with the help of a friendly policeman found a 'bus for Holborn.

The afternoon was spent in writing a report of the Patronal Festival from a defective memory, abetted by an effective imagination on the part of Irons, while Leigh—who came in after dinner—supplied what he called the necessary anti-Papist gaff.

§ 4

Soon after six Richard and Frank set out for Bayswater, where Rita Simons lived with her mother.

" They're Jews, of course," said Leigh, " but personally I look on that as an advantage, for it means they've got at least two things I appreciate—money and brains."

Frank remembered a little old man who used to keep a

silversmith's shop in Tenterden, and who was said by report to be a Jew. That was his sole experience of the race.

"They're a clever people," continued Richard, "and now they're coming into their own a bit. Dizzy has helped them a lot—indirectly I mean. The country's beginning to see that a Hebrew's shekels aren't entirely the result of sharp dealing, or rather that to make sharp dealing possible you must have a sharp intellect behind it."

"Are the Simonses very rich?"

"No—they're comfortably off, but in their case it's the brains that are the attraction. Rita's a monstrous clever girl—cleverer than any of us, I say. You should see some of the stuff she's written. She's got a novel coming out with Bentley's next mnoth, which they say knocks Currer Bell to pieces—and some bigger swells still, if you ask my opinion."

Frank felt nervous. He had never spoken to a "clever" woman—indeed, now he came to think of it, to scarcely any woman except Maggie—and he dreaded the ordeal. Was a literary woman like a literary man? he wondered. Irons had said that Currer Bell was ugly and stupid and had not a word to say for herself. In the last respect, he thought, with a sudden twist of irony, she would be a welcome change from the male of her species.

They drove in an omnibus to Piccadilly Circus, then walked the rest of the way, as they were in plenty of time and Richard wanted Frank to see the West End. They went up Piccadilly as far as Bond Street, then up Bond Street to Brook Street, and through the quiet, lazy squares at the back of Park Lane to Stanhope Gate, where they turned into the Park itself. Frank scarcely knew whether he was most struck by the glitter and noise of Piccadilly, with the elegant carriages and the shops and the women's gowns, or by those peaceful groves of wealth, where footmen with powdered heads and plush breeches leaned against the doorposts, and where through an uncurtained window one sometimes saw a room flaming prematurely with gas and had glimpses of gorgeous plush furniture,

ormolu clocks, gilt chandeliers, and other wonders. He felt quite dazzled by the riches which seemed to pile themselves in the blocks between Piccadilly Circus and the Park. If Richard had not pulled him on, he would have stopped to gaze into the uncurtained rooms like a child into a Christmas shop, or to stare at the footmen as at the drummers outside the booth of a fair.

Hyde Park itself did not impress him much—his memories of the Oxney fields were still fresh enough to make it seem parched and dingy. The brown grass, the smoke-grimed bark of the trees, the formal arrangement of the flowers and shrubs, were even more alien to his experience than bricks and mortar. The men and women he passed, too, now struck him as yellow and wilted like the grass, the men shrivelled like July shrubs, while the languid women were like lilies past their prime, drooping on their stalks. At that very moment, perhaps, Maggie was going to milk the cows in the Dutch barn . . . he could see her sitting there in her blue cotton gown, her head close to the piebald flank, so that her white neck gleamed through the shadows, with the dim coil of her hair above it. He could hear the hiss of milk in her wooden pail, and he felt he would like to kiss her fingers as the milk ran over them. . . . Dear, farmyard, milk-sweet Maggie! How much rather would he be going to see her than this novel-writing Jewess. Perhaps, after all, he had been a fool to make such an exchange. He remembered the story of the man who sold his birthright for a mess of pottage, and afterwards found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.

Corner Street stands far back from the Bayswater Road, deep in a web of streets and crescents and terraces, itself a *cul-de-sac*, blocked by the back gardens of a fashionable road. There was a tiny garden between the gate and the front door of Number Twenty. A mopy laburnum tree hung over the path, and there was a row of lupins at the area's edge. The house was pleasantly furnished, and one or two antique chests and cupboards warmed Frank's heart with memories of Moon's Green.

Rita Simons and her mother were alone, Richard having let them know that his inspired ploughboy did not shine in company. Mrs. Simons was a middle-aged woman, with ten years added to her appearance by her bulk. Rita surprised Frank. She was quite young, plump, and pretty in a pronounced Jewish way. She did not alarm him with "clever" talk, but while Leigh talked to her mother, drew Frank to the window seat, with a view of smoky flower gardens, and asked him questions about his work and Moon's Green in so simple and friendly a manner, that in time his shyness was forgotten and his tongue wagging quite noisily.

He found that she was passionately interested in her work, and had every modern movement and rising name at her finger-tips; but she seemed far more eager to discuss his affairs than her own. There was about her an immense vitality; somehow he could not imagine her writing novels —it seemed far too crabbed and unfeminine an occupation for one of her bloom and brightness. She wore a dress of some soft silky stuff, and there was a red rose in her hair. She had tiny, delicate hands, a brownish skin, and the most wonderful eyes Frank had ever seen—they were blue, yet gave an idea of darkness, and the voluptuous droop of the eyelids, with her full, red, oriental lips, reminded him of a sphinx. He found himself thinking all kinds of queer thoughts about her, wondering what sort of life she had led, if she had many lovers, why she was not married. She was mysterious; he found the word with an odd little gratified thrill, for it suited her exactly—mysterious; that was what she was, in spite of all her vividness and candour.

It never occurred to him to wonder what her novel was like or to ask her any questions about her writing. For the first time since his coming to town he enjoyed the luxury of a good long talk about himself. He told her about his boyhood on the farm, about papa, about the Coalbrans—nothing especial about Maggie—about his work with Mr. Bellack and his secret writings in the attic. Her attention

and sympathy made him forget that he had known her only three hours—three hours which seemed as one when Richard rose and said they positively must go and not keep the ladies up any longer.

" Well, what did you think of her ? " he asked, when they were in the unrefreshed darkness of the streets.

" She's—mysterious," said Frank.

" All women are," said Richard.

Frank, with his limited experience, of which he was most humbly conscious, did not venture to disagree.

" She's a brilliant woman," continued Leigh—" you should hear her talk. You didn't give her much chance to-night."

Frank blushed guiltily. " She seemed so interested."

" And, by Jove, old chap, she was ! That's what makes Rita so splendid—she's interested in everybody and in everything."

" She asked me to come again and bring something I'd written."

" We'll go back next Monday—that's her salon night. You'll meet some interesting people there, people on the make. She doesn't go in for the big swells much, but she'll be useful to you all the same. Irons wouldn't be where he is now, if it wasn't for her."

Frank couldn't see that Irons was anywhere in particular, still he said politely, " I reckon she'd help on any man, just by listening to him as she did to me."

" She was his mistress for a couple of years, but now that's all fizzled out, and they're just capital friends. What did you say ? "

" Nothing," said Frank, who had said " Oh ! " in tones of outrage and disillusion.

§ 5

As time went on, young Rainger found himself more established and confident. He lost the sense of airlessness and muddle, and soon learned to adapt himself to

the change from physical to mental labour, which had paralysed him at the start. After a few weeks he learned not only to enjoy listening to the talk which had at first bewildered him, but to talk himself. He also learned to smoke and to drink a moderate amount of wine.

To a certain extent his health suffered, he lost some of the ruddiness with which he had come up to town, and Richard told him his appearance was much improved thereby.

"You're not so bad to look at now you've ceased to have a complexion like a raw beef-steak. It's a pity your hair's red, but it's not carrots, so there's no need for you to worry."

Frank would not have dreamed of worrying over such a thing as his appearance, still he was glad that Leigh approved, and to please him and Irons ordered a suit of clothes from their tailor. He was told that his country outfit was quite impossible, so put it away till he should be able to go for a visit to Kent. This was not likely to happen for some time—if it happened at all—for he found that among the many country ideas he had to readjust to town standards was his idea of the value of money. Before he came to London he had looked on his three hundred pounds as riches, now he eyed it with horrible misgivings. Money in London was treacherously fluid—one could not, as in the Isle of Oxney, go for days, perhaps weeks, without spending a penny. Ten yards from his door there would be a dozen calls on his purse : 'buses, cabs—most necessary to a man who did not know his way—the daily paper—whoever thought of reading the daily paper at Moon's Green ?—tempting shops, pathetic crossing-sweepers. Besides, there were his regular expenses, such as his share of the Bury Street rooms, food, and the entertainment of other young men, who drank a great deal of wine—and when Frank paid his first bill at the wine merchant's, he was astonished to find how much more expensive the nasty stuff was than gingerbeer, that paradisal drink.

There was no doubt about it ; if he did not work hard

he would soon find himself in the poorhouse. It appeared that his account of the Patronal Festival at St. Barnabas had pleased readers of *Home Sermons*, and he was given more work of the same kind to do. There were, besides, rumours of another paper to be started on similar lines, but of greater importance, and Frank was told that he must try hard for a post on the staff of this. He felt discouraged—he had not come up to London to work for religious papers. He had never taken the slightest interest in religion, and was bored to tears by his present job. There was irony in the fact that his first appearance in print—that most thrilling occasion in an author's life—should be over the signature of "Indignant Protestant." However, he realised that he must take what came along, and made no demur when his editor sent him round to St. George's-in-the-East or St. Peter's, London Docks—indeed, in time he learned to supply the "anti-Papist gaff" without Richard's help.

Mr. Bellack was, of course, interested in Frank's unexpected line of work, and generally ordered the numbers of *Home Sermons* in which his articles appeared. Sometimes he sent these back interlined with comments of his own. The Tractarian Movement in the Church of England had not yet got as far as Wittersham, and Frank had had no idea of what Mr. Bellack thought of it till now—indeed, not even now had he much idea, for the pencilled notes in *Home Sermons* were an unsatisfactory guide, seeming sometimes to favour the revolting Ritualists, sometimes the protesting Evangelicals, sometimes to jeer at them both. It struck Frank that they were very unlike the comments of a parson, and it suddenly occurred to him to wonder if Mr. Bellack really was religious. Now he came to think of it, he had never spoken very much about religion, and beyond teaching Frank his Catechism and seeing that he was brought at the proper age to be confirmed, had not seemed to trouble much about his spiritual life or about spiritual things in general. Of course he preached on Sundays, but his sermons were often not his own, being

read from the works of Ken and Blair and other theologians. Hitherto Frank had vaguely taken for granted that because Mr. Bellack was a clergyman he was therefore and in consequence religious ; but now he wondered. . . .

He heard from the Rector oftener than he heard from Maggie. Her letters were a great disappointment. He had not expected much, for he knew that she was, as she said, " no scholard," but he had expected more than the occasional smeary scrap of paper, on which she would, in a sprawling childish hand, record such facts as " the hops is all in now," and " Mary's carf is ded," and that she was " his sinseer friend Margaret Coalbran." Such seemed to him a poor return for his long weekly outpourings, in which he told her all about his life and work, and reassured her of his love.

However, he was far too busy and interested in other things to brood much over their halting correspondence, though in time he came to write less often—without any apparent dissatisfaction on her part. Gradually his life at Moon's Green was slipping away from him into the past, becoming dimmer and more unreal, while his new life and his new friends absorbed all his spilling enthusiasm. He soon had a little circle of familiars ; once his shyness had worn off, his simple friendly manner, his generosity, and his entire lack of conceit, made him popular everywhere, even when the glamour of Richard's inspired ploughboy myth had been dispelled by his acknowledgments of gentle birth and a decent education. He grew to be on friendly terms with most of the young men who came to smoke and drink and talk in one another's rooms, or, more ceremoniously, in Corner Street.

Rita Simons had what she called a " salon," which met at her house on Mondays, and smokelessly discussed the literary topics of the hour. Except for a sprinkling of women and the absence of pipes and occasional bawdry it was pretty much the same as the gatherings elsewhere. One met the same people every time—Weston, the hawk-faced despiser of every one except Thackeray ; Griggs of

the simian jowl, who hymned domestic sentiment in crutched, stumbling rhymes, and strawed palms in the way of the American novel; Deacon, who had been for years at work on a novel dealing with the siege of Jerusalem, which, according to those who had seen the manuscript, would put Lytton's fame in the utmost jeopardy if he should ever do anything so unexpected as to finish it; Bazzett, who wrote the Clubman's Column in the *West End Sentinel*; Cremer, who was said to write the whole of the *Liberal Courier* daily, including the advertisements.

At first Frank was disappointed at not meeting any celebrities, but Miss Simons assured him he would be much more disappointed if he met them.

"They're very dull people," she said, pausing one evening to bend over his chair, as she flitted about her drawing-room, radiant in copper-coloured silk, with a long floating shawl full of golden threads: "I make it a rule to have only the coming men here. They're so much more exciting to watch and amusing to talk to. You never know what they're going to be—what world-famous genius you may be teasing," and she flicked her little ivory fan in Frank's eyes.

He was quite a particular friend of hers now, though since his first visit he had not been to her house except on "salon" nights. She nearly always found time to come and sit beside him, to ask him questions about his work, or to read over any little thing he had written. He even showed her "The Road from Northiam to Lomas," and was quite staggered by her praise.

At first, after what Richard had told him, he had been inclined to look upon her as a "loose" woman, but he soon came to see that he must not apply that word as it was understood at Moon's Green. Whatever she might have done, however she might have loved, there was nothing wanton or unguarded in her manner, such as his country code and experience would have led him to expect. He realised that such relationships as hers with Irons were viewed far more tolerantly here than in the Isle of Oxney.

There was nothing flagrant or openly immoral in the set to which he belonged—the men were always inclined to be stand-offish in their attitude to the rather sparse and spare young women who came to Rita's gatherings—but Frank was quite aware that such unions did exist among his friends, and though all his ideas were against them, he had lost a great deal of the shocked disgust which had been his attitude at the start. He sometimes thought that Rita was unhappy. She always seemed vivacious and light-hearted, but now and then in her sphinx-like eyes he caught a different look a-darkening.

§ 6

Early in the following autumn Dr. Protestant made his appearance. For some time there had been talk of a successor to *Home Sermons*, which was dying of general anæmia caused by a defective circulation. The editor, consulting with Pauncefort, suggested that the public had grown tired of religion pure and simple, mere pious pap; they wanted party religion just as they wanted party politics, and for a long time the most popular feature of *Home Sermons* had been the vitriolic correspondence which had followed the *Revelations* concerning St. Barnabas, Pimlico.

The editor's plan was to start a definitely anti-Tractarian paper, and he proposed calling it "Dr. Protestant," after *Punch's* cartoon, in which the indignant doctor rebukes the impudent Puseyites. *Punch*, too, inspired him with the idea of personifying his paper. As Mr. Punch presided good-humouredly with hump and stick and dog Toby over his own genial pages, so should Dr. Protestant's august presence brood over the journal which bore his name.

An artist was commissioned to draw him—tall, bearded, black-robed, with Geneva cap. The various sections of the paper were all called after him—Dr. Protestant in Parliament, Dr. Protestant in the Churches, Dr. Protestant's Library, and so on. There was even talk of giving the Ladies' Page to Mrs. Protestant, though in the end this

was abandoned as likely to provide opponents with too much raw material for blasphemy.

Frank was on the regular staff of the paper, a most lucky appointment he was told, though he himself felt hardly enthusiastic. His work was varied: he reviewed books for Dr. Protestant's Library, he ground out articles on Calvin's translation of the Scriptures, the "Domestic Life of Martin Luther," "Smithfield Martyrs," "Forged Decretals," and the "Immoralities of Popes"—his old habit of writing "essays" for Mr. Bellack on every conceivable subject now for the first time useful. Once even, when the animosities of Dr. Protestant's Letter Box were losing vigour, he wrote over the signature of "A Distressed Mother" the terrible account of how her daughter was decoyed by priests into the confessional and came to no good there.

But his chief business was collecting material for that popular feature, "Dr. Protestant in the Churches." He was soon familiar with every Ritualist church in London. He no longer took notes during service, partly for safety's sake—since the day he saw the choir of St. Paul's, Knightsbridge, come in to sing the Communion with brickbats under their surplices—partly because he could easily supply from memory the kind of stuff Dr. Protestant wanted, and preferred at the time to give himself up to comfortable indolence. He was growing more languid and more nervous as the result of his sedentary life, and soon he came to find a kind of peace in those dark interiors, with their crooning organs, and the etiolated voices of their faithful. There was beauty, too, in the lights that shifted and swayed round the altar, glowing on marble and cloth of gold, while the blue smeeth of the incense rocked up from the censers, and young boys in scarlet and white grouped themselves against shadowy backgrounds. Sometimes Frank would slip into cloudy, sensuous dreams, where music, perfume and colour would be woven with strange thoughts which at once enticed and disturbed him.

In time these voluptuous experiences had their effect,

calling up a hitherto undeveloped sensuousness. He became more dreamy, more luxurious, more in love with physical sensations. He was losing some of his hardiness, learning to appreciate warmth, good food, soft linen; he often would turn round and look after beautiful women in the streets, longing to touch their hair or the soft stuff of their gowns. . . .

His pilgrimages were not only to the more notorious churches, but also to others where popery was embryonic. If a rumour came to Dr. Protestant that the curate-in-charge of some obscure suburban church had in his sermon referred to the Altar instead of the Holy Table, or some rash Vicar substituted a collecting bag for the traditional plate, off he would send his henchman to investigate the scandal. Frank soon learned to talk the jargon of his tribe, and knew the varying degrees of guilt attached to intoned responses, the Eastward Position, Altar Lights, and Early Celebrations—was familiar with each dread step of the Ritualist's Progress, from a surpliced choir to sacramental confession.

In a few months he was heartily sick of the whole business. He was bored by the quarrels of churchmen, and disgusted by the spite and calumny with which they were sustained—to the point of being embittered against a system which until then he had, if not enthusiastically admired, at least respectfully accepted. But his chief grievance was personal. After six months' struggle and hard work, here he was on the staff of a low-class religious paper, grinding away for his daily bread at a job he hated. In spite of the promises held out to him before he came to town, he had not been offered a stroke of work by the *Post* —not even a novel for review. Richard promised to do his best for him, but at present, he said, the *Post* was overstaffed, and he advised Frank to make the best of his opportunities, and get all he could out of Dr. Protestant before that illustrious divine came to the bad end which every one in newspaper land had foretold from the first day of publication.

To Richard and Irons, the idea of Frank Rainger, ex-farmer and genius of the Kentish soil, plodding round London in search of contraventions of the Act of Uniformity, was the finest joke in the world, and sometimes, when he was with them, even Frank himself could not help laughing at it. They were never tired of inventing scurrilous anecdotes about Dr. Protestant, and apparently had full information as to his early life and private habits, which would seem to have been less austere than his solemn look and pious language might suggest. They were always telling scandalous stories about him, and loved to hint unmentionable things between him and Elizabeth Cranmer, who, in default of Mrs. Protestant, edited the Ladies' Page —now fast becoming indispensable to all up-to-date papers.

In more serious moods, Leigh would harangue Frank by the hour on the advantage of having a regular job, no matter how mean and uncongenial.

" Pauncefort's got every one he wants at present, and, of course, he's not likely to take you on till he's sure what stuff you're made of. You'll have to put more ginger into your work if you want to write for the *Post*, you know."

" Ginger—but how am I to put ginger into an account of some idiot's sermon on the Ornaments Rubric ? "

" Oh, there's a way of doing it," said Richard vaguely.

§ 7

One day, early in the next year, Frank was at work alone in the study, reviewing some dreary little Evangelical tracts, which it was a weariness to read, and a pain to remember even for the time required to write a laudatory paragraph. Outside, a dense yellow fog lay like filthy porridge between the houses, and though it was only three o'clock a gas-jet screamed above his head.

He felt utterly heart-sick. Not only the hatefulness, but the insincerity of his task was weighing on him—at first it had been rather amusing to crush his identity into that of " Indignant Protestant," but now he was growing

tired of writing what he neither felt nor believed. Not that he had ecclesiastical leanings towards the Puseyites —they struck him, in their different way, as being as irritating and absurd as the Evangelicals—but at all events they had some idea of beauty, some sense of mystery and colour, and he was day by day becoming more strongly convinced that it was beauty and colour which were good in life, and dinginess and repression which were mistaken and evil.

He leaned his chin on his hand, dropping his detested pen. Dinginess and repression seemed far more evident in London than in the Isle of Oxney. There, at least, one always had the vital, various beauty of the fields, the freedom of the wind, the broadness of the sky—here was nothing but confining streets, with wind and sky blotted into one stifling substantial fog. What would he have said, he wondered, if a year ago he had been told that the only beauty and brightness in his London life would be found in church ? . . . He could not help laughing at the thought. Of course, there were the evenings spent in Richard's rooms, or in Weston's, or in Deacon's, or at the Simons's—but these were not the witty revels he had dreamed of at Moon's Green ; they were nothing but a gathering together of young men to talk about themselves, discuss aimlessly the same dreary shop, and sometimes end by getting dingily drunk.

With a groan he picked up his pen and *Little Hannah's Prayer : or, By Faith Alone.* At the same moment he thought he heard a footfall on the stairs, and the swish of skirts. He hesitated, ready to welcome even the diversion of a visit from the landlady, though the step sounded too light for either her or her servant. There was a knock, and before he could reply the door opened and an elegant little bonnet was poked round it.

" Miss Simons," cried Frank, scrambling to his feet.

" I hope I don't intrude—is Stephen at home ? "

" No, he's gone round to Deacon's—I don't suppose he'll be long."

" Then may I wait ? " She came forward to the fire,

and began drawing off her gloves. "I've brought my *Quarterly Review* criticism round to show him—and you too, if you care to read it."

"I hope your book's been well received."

Rita shrugged.

"As well as it deserves. Of course most critics dislike women writers. They say that writing's a man's job, and that we're unsexing ourselves—now, if all women wrote like Currer Bell . . . but, thank goodness, they don't. Have you read those charming little sketches by Mrs. Gaskell, in *Household Words*—all about dear old maids in a country village? That's the only sort of stuff a woman should be allowed to write, the only sort she can write without unsexing herself."

By this time Rita was comfortably established in the armchair, her dainty little boots on the fender. It was the first time Frank had seen her in Bury Street, though she had come once or twice in his absence; for she had with Irons what is perhaps the ideal relation between man and woman—the friendship of those who have once been lovers. He could not help realising how the general drabness seemed to light up with her presence, and the bookish fustiness bud into perfume. Tenderly and gratefully he arranged the cushions at her back, and she wriggled her shoulders out of her pelisse, to show a strange blooming bodice of orange silk in the dinginess of the chair.

"Mr. Rainger, do you think it a mistake for women to write?"

She leaned back, looking up at him with her sphinx-like, shadowed eyes, while the little column of her throat showed white against the fur on her shoulders.

He stammered, sick to death of insincerity, but as loath to hurt her as to crush a flower.

"I—I don't know. I liked your book."

"But you'd rather some one else had written it. Be candid, now."

"It's not like a woman's book."

"Nor like a man's."

" N-no, perhaps not."

" I'm told I write like Harriet Martineau. That's to say my particular ape of manliness is intellectual, not physical and Currer-Bellish."

" You've had some wonderful reviews—every one seems to think you could be famous if you chose." There was an unconscious note of antagonism in his voice. He stood looking down at her, that little thing in furs, that soft exotic woman of doubtful virtue, who had done better than he with his manhood and integrity. Suddenly she flung out her arms, with a jingle of bracelets.

" My God ! I wish I was a man."

" I don't." The words ran to his tongue without thought.

" Why ? " she asked, and her queer almond eyes seemed at once to contract and kindle.

He could not answer. He became suddenly and unaccountably nervous, and began to poke the fire with embarrassed violence.

" Well, don't let's talk any more about me," said Rita in a matter-of-fact voice. " How are you getting on with Dr. Protestant ? "

" I hate the work."

" Of course you do, but it will provide you with an income, while you're writing something big in your spare time."

" I'm not writing anything in my spare time."

" For shame ! You mean you've nothing more to show me like ' The Road from Northiam to Lomas ' ? "

He shook his head.

Rita waxed indignant. " But that's what you're here for. You're not in London to write for the papers, surely. You're only doing that to pay for your board and lodging while the great book's on the way."

" There's no great books on the way."

He was astounded by her vehemence—she started up in the chair, her eyes blazing, her cheeks and throat pink with excitement.

" But there must be a great book—there shall be one.

Oh, Frank, I'll be so disappointed if you aren't famous some day. You've got it in you—I know you have."

"It looks like it! Here I've been nearly nine months in London, and got no further than a vulgar religious rag. If I'd the smallest gleam of talent in me, I'd have been on the *Post* by this time."

"I don't mean that sort of talent. You've no aptitude for journalism whatever. You'll never be on the *Post*."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I hope I'm not betraying confidences, but Richard Leigh told me the other day that he was infinitely disappointed in your newspaper work."

"He's never said anything to me about it—except that perhaps I ought to put more ginger into things."

"I daresay. Of course he feels a bit guilty at having persuaded you to come up to town. But I told him there's not the slightest need. You may have no talent for journalism, but you've other talents of a very high order, and the newspaper work will pay for your bread and butter while you're writing something more worthy of you."

"You mean my country things?"

"Yes. Some of those sketches are simply marvellous—they're crude and queer in places, but there's the real stuff of genius in them, I tell you there is. It's simply wicked for you to be discouraged and give up that kind of writing, just because you have to work at something else which you don't like and aren't getting on at. Oh, Frank, you've got—all men have got—what I want most in the world and can never have, because I'm a woman: you've got a career. I think to have a career before you must be the most wonderful thing in the world, and it's the chief reason why I want to be a man. But since I can't have one of my own, I've resolved to help other, luckier people with theirs. I can't do much—but if I can make you realise you've a career ahead of you, and put you into the right way of using your gifts, then I shall at least have done something."

A faint colour had crept into her olive cheeks, her eyes

were blazing, and she leaned over the arm of the chair towards him. Frank felt strangely roused and stirred, with something thick in his throat. He found it hard to speak, because of a queer embarrassment which clogged his words.

"I don't see why you shouldn't have a career—just like a man," he said jerkily, realising that this was not really at all what he wanted to say. "You do a man's work."

"A woman may be able to do a man's work—for a time—but she never makes a career out of it; it's her fate, and it's her nature. Very few women want a career—why, I sometimes think that even I don't really want one. I may love my work, and talk big about it, and all that, but, Frank, I've an idea that I shall end up the same way as hundreds of other women, who've not written a line—I mean, marry and have babies, and never have time to read, let alone write."

"I don't see why you should—I mean why it should stop you writing."

"Oh, but it will. I shouldn't marry unless I meant to give up my writing—it wouldn't be fair on the man. Besides, in time I expect I shall be tired of the dusty street." . . .

She leaned back, and stared dreamily into the fire. "This intellectual bohemianism, it isn't a life for a woman. Every woman who's more than half a woman wants to be loved and taken care of, and as long as she has sense, she's better without brains. Oh, God! I wish I was a man."

Frank did not speak; he was trembling. He could not take his eyes off her, as she lay back in the cushions, like some little marmoset, with her furs and bright colours. The firelight danced mysteriously in her eyes. Her hand was on the arm of the chair, small and ringed—he suddenly took it into his own.

She did not move, and for a few bewildering moments he sat in silence, holding her soft, luxurious hand, which

seemed to hold a caress in its immobility. Outside a glow of orange crept into the fog, as the street lamps were lighted. Then she slowly turned her eyes from the fire and looked into his.

§ 8

He did not kiss her, though he wanted to, for the next moment Irons came in—and afterwards he was glad. He remembered that he loved Maggie, and that he did not entirely approve of Rita. It was bad to have been even so little disloyal to his country love—and for a woman who, according to her own confession, had unsexed herself. Rita might be brilliant, voluptuous, stirring to the senses, but she was not worthy to hold a candle to Maggie, who was simple and womanly and good. So he told himself that night, as he lay awake, watching the stars wink frostily over his landscape of chimney-pots, no longer caked with fog.

The next day he told himself he was a prig—he was ashamed of having thought contemptuously of Rita, even of having compared her with Maggie Coalbran. She was not a woman to judge by common standards, and his disapproval of her work and way of life was based on mere bumpkin prejudice. The more he thought of yesterday's talk, the more he was grateful for her generous interest, the warmth and friendship she had so whole-heartedly given. Even her final melting seemed now a token of bigness—after all, it was he who had made the first advances, and she was not one of those women who shrink from their own power, and having provoked, refuse to yield, who are afraid of the passions they create . . . he began to wish, after all, that he had kissed her.

During the next few weeks he thought a good deal of Rita, thought more than he saw. From a flitting arabesque in the background of his life, she had suddenly jumped forward into the very centre, showing herself to be of flesh and blood, the warmest, sweetest woman. She had taken

hold of his ideas. She had managed somehow to convince him that in spite of his failure and humiliation, he still had great things ahead of him. Fired by her words, he began to work in his spare time at the kind of stuff she said would make him famous. At first he had wondered if he would be able to write in London, but after some preliminary hesitations out it poured, the hot crude substance of his heart, so different from the emasculate tepidity of his newspaper work.

He found in it, too, a new happiness; for, as he wrote of the Isle of Oxney, the Rother Levels, the cow-patched, village-topped hills of Kent, the Sussex woods in the blue south, he had—so great was the creative illusion—a part respite of his home-sickness. He seemed to feel his feet once more on the long white lick of road that crosses the marsh from Wittersham to Four Wents, he could hear the wind thrumming its reed-music along the dykes, or moaning and scuffling in some little ghostly wood . . . and when he came to himself and saw the flayed yellow wall-paper of the study, or the window-full of greasy roofs funnelled with chimneys, he did not feel heart-sore and disappointed, as one might have thought, but invigorated by the fact that he had snatched into his prison at least a fragment of the beauty he hungered for. And it must stay, for it was written—he had cast over it the spell of the written word. It lay there before him on the page, seized by his thought, transfixed by his pen, like a butterfly caught and pinned to paper.

All this, he knew, was Rita's doing; without her he would have touched nothing but his journalistic work. She often inquired as to his progress, and made helpful suggestions. Why should he not write a Kentish *Cranford* —more virile, more roomy than Mrs. Gaskell's work, with a bigger place given to scenery, kin only by form, being a series of sketches, with a connecting human link? Frank liked the idea, and laboured at it, though on the whole he thought it best to write miscellaneously at present, leaving cohesion to be achieved by a final effort.

During this time Rita did not come to Bury Street—he wondered why. Did she fear to interrupt him, or did she regret having once enticed him? He often wished she would come, but was too shy to ask her. He went every Monday to her house, and at other times as well, in hopes of finding her alone. But her mother was always present, kind and monumental. Sometimes he told himself he was glad, for he felt if he were to see Rita alone, he would have to take up their relations as they had left them in Bury Street, ignoring all the polite social intercourse and comradely discussions which had come in the interval; and when he asked himself if he wanted to go on with that which he had so unthinkingly begun, he could not find an answer.

Of course, he told himself, he was bound to Maggie, and when he felt really convinced about this, he knew it was rash of him to see even as much of Rita as he did. But he did not always feel convinced. Maggie's letters were scrappier and cruder than ever. Sometimes he told himself that it was merely want of education which made them so unsatisfying, and at others he would swear that nothing but indifference could account for them. Mr. Bellack mentioned her occasionally in his letters, and once wrote that she was being courted by Jim Harman of Mockbeggar. Frank immediately dashed off a letter to Maggie, who had been silent for some weeks, asking her if this were true; to which in course of time came the reply that "Jim Harman had arxed her, but she had sed no." There was no indication of any flattering motive for her refusal, but at the end of the note her style melted into "Yours with love"—an extraordinary concession.

After all, he reflected, he had never definitely asked her to marry him—marriage was out of the question for many years to come—and though the nature of his courtship had suggested no other end, it was possible that she thought it right to hang back till he had definitely declared himself. He felt angry with her for this. Didn't she trust him? He remembered that it was she who had first

thought of the class-difference between them. There was no denying that she was of a practical, cautious nature—she came of careful stock, and her upbringing would encourage inherited prudence. At first he was for writing to her straight off and asking her to marry him, though the marriage could not be for many years, but was withheld, partly by natural resentment at her untrustful attitude, and partly by a strange unwillingness to pledge himself, which he found when he came to the point.

This discovery distressed him, for it showed him that Rita Simons's hold was far stronger than he had at first imagined. He felt anxious and restless. Was it possible that he was in love with Rita? Was it possible that he could be in love with two women at the same time? There was no denying that Rita had an extraordinary power over him. He found that out when he tried to stop visiting her. He stayed away a fortnight, during which he suffered tortures of restlessness and craving—he worked hard, he visited his men friends, he scraped unsatisfactory acquaintance with other women, but it was all no use, and at the end of a fortnight he was back again in Corner Street, feeling that his absence had only bound him closer.

There was also another dangerous consequence. Rita seemed to change her attitude towards him—he could see that she now definitely meant to attract him. She still kept away from Bury Street, but in her own house her manner was subtly altered; she did not cease to be frank and friendly, but combined with her comradeliness was a full measure of that exotic lure which had so stirred him a month ago. Sometimes he would feel conscious of her sphinx-eyes upon him, calling to his own, and then, when he had unwillingly turned them to meet hers, draining as it were his very soul out of them. He became embarrassed and self-conscious in her presence, and yet there was no use leaving her, for he knew he would have to come back.

As the weeks went by, he could feel himself being drawn closer. Her attraction was at once subtle and crude—in

word and in act she was too clever to be unrestrained, but she was quite naïve in her use of personal charm. Her silks, her brightness, her hair, her eyes, her neck, her mouth like a ripe grape, the plump curves of her body, all were part of the snare. He knew that she was making appeal to the most material, most animal part of him, and yet the appeal was not entirely low, for her generosity, her candour, her honest friendship called him too. Here was a woman who would not only give him love, but comradeship, who was even more interested in his future than he was himself, who did not ask merely to lie in his arms, but to fight by his side. She was using her body to draw him, because experience told her that was the surest way, but she meant to give him a great deal more than her body.

He could not help comparing her courageous suit—for it amounted to that, though she used no means that shocked him—with Maggie's prudent carefulness, that rustic caution which would not move an inch without having its whole path guaranteed. Maggie had once more dropped into epistolary silence, and he could not help turning to the woman who showed him by a hundred little tokens that he was never out of her thoughts.

But he did not yield. He was held back partly by his loyalty to the girl he had openly professed to love, partly by the integrity which was natural to him and in which he had been brought up. He suffered horribly. Sometimes he asked himself what would happen if he yielded. He would become just One of Her Lovers—for he knew now that she had had others besides Irons. He could not marry her, and he did not think for a moment that she wished to marry him. What she wanted was love and colour and life and youth and joyfulness.

She was one of the Wise Ungodly.

§ 9

Spring came, after some delays, to town. A wondering primrose would dapple the sky behind the chimneys at

dawn, and Frank, who had not lost his country habit of waking early, would lie and watch it creep among the clouds, full of an unseizable promise which made his heart throb with eagerness and pain.

Throughout the whole day there would be a queer call and quickening—he would be conscious of it beyond the smoke, the rattle of hoofs and wheels, the tramp and jabber of the pavements, the blocking houses, the soot-caked trees. He had never thought that one could be so conscious of spring in London. It was not only the tiny green shoots on the trees of St. James's Park, the florescence of Mayfair windows, the primroses and violets that were thrust into his face by flower-sellers on the kerb. It was rather the pervading of a spirit, the vernal omnipresence, as marked in Piccadilly as at Moon's Green, though in a different, more tragic way—as a starling in a cage is different from a starling in the trees.

He longed for the Isle of Oxney—to see the wild cherry patch, the woods with papery white, while primroses, like a dropped morning sky, lit up the darkness of the under-growth. He would dream of the pale water-flower that scummed the channel of the Reading Sewer, of the lingering April dusk that bloomed into starlight above the woods of Kitchenhour.

Sometimes he would think of going to Moon's Green for a few days, but there were many things against it—the demands of his work, the coils of his finance, and above all a strange unwillingness. In his heart he knew that he would not find at Moon's Green what he really sought. The fields and the marshes and the moon could not give it—though they all spoke of it. The most wonderful spring gift was here in London. for him to take—if he dare make the vernal sacrifice.

Working in the room of the flayed yellow wall-paper, plodding through the spring mire of the streets in search of riotous Puseyism, smoking a gross pipe and drinking indifferent Burgundy with self-and-shop-satisfied news-paper men, strolling in Hyde Park to haer the band play

and pry the wonder of the daffodils—the same sweet call pursued him, the call of Love and Spring. It was in the wind that brought unexpected perfumes mysteriously round street corners, in the sudden gurgling note of a blackbird in a plane tree, in the trail of little rosy clouds above the roofs at sunset, in the first muslins in Regent Street windows, in the whorls of sun and dust that bowled down Piccadilly; and, most dangerous of all, it was in a woman's eyes, in the accident of her touch, in the flutter of her skirts in the April wind.

He dared not go near her, and he could not keep away. Sometimes he made fate-challenging plans of escape, but he knew all the while that he could not carry them out. In his conflict he often thought of Maggie, but she was unreal and far away, like the fields of Kent. She had forgotten him, and he no longer considered himself bound to her, though he knew that she was womanly and good, and that in her he could find peace. Rita would never give him peace, but she would give him life and joy and hope—the spring. Dare he run away from the spring, from his own fulfilment? He remembered that dawn of a year ago, that cold fog scattering from the marsh, and those two feet projecting in tragical grotesqueness from the sinking waters of the dyke. . . .

At last came a day when he reached home early and depressed after an interview with his editor at Dr. Protestant's headquarters. It appeared that he still lacked ginger, though the editor, who was a churchwarden, called it conviction. "In your account of the outrageous proceedings at St. Alban's, Holborn, it seems at times almost as if you sympathised with the Romanisers." To which Frank had been piqued to reply: "I don't sympathise with Romanisers, but I do sympathise with any one who tries to bring more beauty and colour into life. That's why I sometimes forget to come down on these people as hard as I might." "You had better not forget too often, Mr. Rainger," said the editor coldly, "that is to say, if you wish to remain on our staff." Frank

didn't, but neither did he want to lose his thirty shillings a week. His own private funds were getting very low, for he had not yet succeeded in living entirely on his salary, and if he was not careful, his capital would be exhausted before the publication of his book could replenish it. He was quite aware that he kept his present berth only because it would be difficult to find another man to do the same work for the same price, and if he lost it he would not be likely to find a job elsewhere. In plain words, he was a failure.

These were not cheery thoughts to take home with him, and in addition, it was raining—a fine drizzle, which made the air thick and moist and the pavements scummy. It was cold, too, and the cabmen had put on again their coats of many capes, and through closed windows he could see the leap of fires. When he came to Bury Street, he dragged himself upstairs, feeling tired and disinclined for his evening's work. The study door was ajar, and through the opening he could see the dance of firelight. This comforted him a little.

Then suddenly his heart stood still. As he went into the room, he saw that the big armchair had been pulled between him and the fire, and two little silken feet were on the fender. A woman's shawl and gloves were on the table. He scarcely breathed—he felt that if he made a noise she might vanish, and leave him alone in the dinginess and drizzle. He asked himself why she had come, but in his heart he knew.

Then he heard her call him—" Frank ! "

" Rita ! " He came forward, and for a moment stood looking down at her. She did not move, just lay back luxuriously, her eyes blinking at him from under her flowery bonnet, her lips smiling and enticing. Then her beauty, her boldness, and his own sick reaction from drabness and failure, overwhelmed him. On all sides were darkness and disappointment, rain and tears, but here at least was spring and love for him to hold. . . . He sank on his knees at her feet, pressing his lips against her dangling

arm. Then suddenly he reached up to her, and pulling her down to his shoulder, covered her face and neck with kisses.

§ 10

It was strange, when he came to think of it, how little difference his love for Rita made in his life, once he had got over the first wonder of it. He had expected it to change him, as a volcanic eruption changes a landscape—by convulsion. It did nothing of the kind; indeed its effect was curiously steadying. He lost the vague torments of dissatisfaction, and with them much of his dreamy and romantic outlook disappeared. He became more practical and more material, and at the same time much happier. He now had a healthy and natural means of self-expression, and no longer had to seek it in his work—with the result that his work became a much simpler and more mechanical affair. He no longer fumed when he had to review Protestant pamphlets or attend Puseyite churches, for the main current of his life ran apart from these duties, which he undertook as impersonally as a carpenter makes tables and chairs.

As for his other work, the country sketches, these throve for a different reason. It seemed that when Rita, boldly picking aside decorum, won him for herself, she did so chiefly that she might have some vessel to receive the overflow of her talent and ambition. For a long time she had resolved that Frank should triumph in a certain field, and now with the authority of love she devoted herself to his achievement. She inspired him amazingly—her mind was tumbling with ideas, suggestions, projects, and sometimes he was really doubtful as to which she desired most—his love to-day or his fame to-morrow.

As time went on, he loved her more. No woman ever gave herself like Rita, for she gave so much more than what most women consider all. Not content with making him the most adorable mistress, she would be his friend

and fellow-soldier, she would give him the treasure of her mind, she would pour out her gifts and opportunities at his feet. Her talents were considerable, yet when she loved she had no thought but how she could best turn them to the advantage of her lover. All that she had of wit and intellect was valuable only so far as she could use it in his service. Her own work, and her growing reputation, were forgotten; her longings for a career were satisfied in the making of his.

What made this all the more wonderful was the fact that she never looked on the affair as more than an episode. They were both aware of its impermanence, though they never spoke of it. It was odd, because their love and friendship were so perfect, their confidence in each other so complete. Perhaps, on Frank's side, it was because he was still conscious of Maggie at the back of his life, though he never deliberately thought of her, and was strangely without self-reproach on her account. On Rita's side it was probably due to experience—Frank was her fourth lover—and she saw nothing in this attachment to make it different from those which had gone before.

On the whole, men had treated her badly, but that had in no wise daunted her courage or desire to bestow on them all she had and was. She gave unstintedly while love lasted, and when it was gone neither reproached nor repined. She accepted the penalties of her type. In her history of brief, sensual attachments, it was perhaps characteristic that the affair which had made most impression on her had been entirely ideal and spiritual. She had loved with that idealism possible only to a passionate nature, a young poet, who had given her at most but a few kisses, and finally married a girl whose simplicity he compared triumphantly with Rita's provoking subtleties. He had often reproached her with her want of simplicity. She accepted his decision, and never ceased to love him through all her subsequent attachments. Her love for him was responsible for the dark shade of unhappiness which sometimes gloamed in her eyes.

She told Frank about him, as they sat together one evening in the peeled study.

" But you've forgotten him now, haven't you ? " he said, as he held her in his arms.

" Yes—now. But I'll be as bad again as ever when it's over. He's just waiting for me till I come out of this."

" Out of what ? " he asked sharply.

" Our love, dear."

It was the first time she had said it openly. She turned her head and looked him solemnly in the eyes.

" Frank, dear, you mustn't take this to heart when it's over. No—let me speak. I know more about these things than you. Some people would say I was wicked to have led you on as I did, but there were so many things I wanted to give you which I couldn't give you while we were just friends. I feel there is only one thing about our love which can harm you, and that's if you regret it afterwards. Promise me you will never do that."

" But why should there be an ' afterwards ' ? " Holding her there so warm and silken on his knee, he could not think of a time when she would be far away from his thoughts and his caresses ; his own doubts were stifled in that glowing absorption in the present which passion so wonderfully gives. He strained her to him. " What can divide us ? "

" Nothing—now. When the time comes—anything. I want you to realise that, and to realise it's best. Why should we insist on love being eternal ?—it isn't. It's a flash, a plunge, a stab—an experience you can repeat but not perpetuate. Sometimes you repeat it over and over again with the same person, with decent affection to fill the gaps, and that's called a happy marriage ; ours isn't that sort, and you know it. But you're such a child that I feel that when we separate you'll regret our having ever been together."

" How could I ! Oh, Rita ! " . . .

The thick, loosened strands of her hair fell against his

cheek, and he turned to hide his face in them, for the tears had come into his eyes.

" Well, now I've said all this, we shan't talk of it any more. But I felt it had to be said. I want you to see that our love is no less beautiful and no less right because it doesn't last—it's not unnatural for lovers to part, it's unnatural when they don't."

" But Rita, what will become of you ? What will you do—in the end ? "

" I don't know, dear—though I have a suspicion. I shall probably marry some eligible young man of my own people ; Isadore Cohen has made me more than one offer."

" But I thought you said love did not last."

" I shan't marry for love. I shall marry for a home, a husband, and children."

" Then do you think you'll be happy ? "

" Of course I shall. The happiest time in my life will be when I'm not such a fool as to go about falling in love like this. The happiest—not the best."

§ 11

In June, Frank had a brief escape from London and a breath of country air. It all came from his being dismissed by Dr. Protestant. One morning he received a formal communication that the paper was reducing its staff and that his services would not be required after the following week. No doubt his lack of evangelical ginger was to blame.

At first he was disheartened by the loss of his salary, but Rita immediately took his cause in hand and suggested to her friend Cremer that Frank should help him write the *Liberal Courier*, a task he was supposed to carry out single-handed every day.

" I have it on pretty good authority," she said to Frank, " that the *Liberal Courier* is not long for this world, but it will last you till your book is published, and then——"

Her ecstatic blink and flush compensated him to some extent for the threadbareness of her assistance.

He was not to take up his duties on the *Courier* for a fortnight, and in the meantime Rita suggested that he should go with her and her mother for their summer holiday. They always went into the country by themselves for a week or two every year, staying very quietly in cheap lodgings or at small inns, for Mrs. Simons's income was only the rather scanty pension due to the widow of a man who had served his country in the early days of railroads. Frank was beginning to look pale and fagged with the first hot weather, and could imagine nothing more delightful than to be with Rita in the fields and lanes, tearing their love out of its dingy frame and giving it for the first time a setting worthy of its bloom. They went down to a little inn near Guildford, just off the Pilgrim's Way, and close to the river. Here—in the tangled old garden, with its anomaly of yew hedges and long grass, or in lime-drooped lanes, or in the little paths that cut through the wheat and poppies—their love took on a new quality, a kind of peasanthood. All the ink and London dust were washed away, and they were just a simple boy and girl, who loved without thought. His surroundings were no longer the contrast but the harmony of his love. The thick limes with their perfumed drip of blossom, the heavy green tassels of the wheat, the hot smell of the chalky earth as it baked in the sun, and the river that flowed sedately under dancing flies, with poplars tall above layers of heat and mist—all these, and his love, were the fulfilment of the spring promise, the reward of the spring sacrifice.

Sometimes young men from London would visit them for the day, and talk of books and newspapers and literary scandals, with the rising and setting of reputations, the kindle and burst of stars. But they never stayed—before evening they took themselves and their inkiness away, leaving him and Rita to the wonder of their world. He was sometimes curious as to whether Mrs. Simons knew all

about them—as he soon realised that Leigh and Irons and the other men knew. She never gave a sign, but she left them a good deal to themselves.

"I'm too stout to walk much," she would say if they asked her to come with them. "I enjoy sitting here in the verandah, and reading *Blackwood*."

So Frank and Rita wandered hand in hand in the little stuffy lanes, which smelt of wild geranium, snuffed the hot, thyme-smelling wind on the Hog's Back, or drifted in their boat, drowsy, above the thick, green, luminous Wey. There was a little Belvedere in the garden, a frail, forsaken, eighteenth-century folly on the top of a bank, its greeny-white columns choked up with yew. Here he would often sit in the twilight with Rita on his knees, and they would watch together the motionless poplars by the river, and the stars that sparked the warm sky above the hills. Here sometimes a peculiar sadness would assail them, born of the river, the dark hayfields, and those tall columns of the poplars whispering among the stars. Then he would clasp her to him in passionate silence, as if to hold her against the power that would divide them at last. Their sadness seemed to mature their love; it gave it a wistfulness and beauty which was like the first reddening leaves in a summer wood.

§ 12

At the end of June, Mrs. Simons went for a few days to a sister at Dorking. Frank was deputed to take Rita back to Corner Street. They set off together in high spirits, charmed by their holiday, and positively looking forward to the toils ahead. Frank was eager to start work on the *Courier*, but his biggest thrill was at present the thrill of waiting; for among the many wonderful things which had happened at the Crown Inn had been the finishing of his Kentish sketches, and their despatch to Rita's publisher with an introductory note.

Now there was nothing to be done but to await the

verdict, and, inspired by her confidence, he had few qualms. There was no denying that she had helped him marvellously with his work. Without her he would never have succeeded in putting his sketches together, in humanising them, in co-ordinating them—in fact; in transforming his hectic scribble into that neat manuscript, " The Farms of the Valley," which had at last found its way to Bentley's. He could not help wondering how it was that the men she had so lavishly helped—he knew he was not the first—had never seemed to get beyond a tentative mediocrity. Surely if one of them had possessed the smallest spark of talent she would have set him alight.

London was deep in the brown dusk of a wet afternoon. The rain slanted along the house-fronts, and the pavements were greasy with mud. Rita and Frank took a cab to Bury Street, for she insisted on coming home with him first. She had a tenderness for the yellow study with the moulting walls, and for the chimney-pot country outside Frank's window. It was here their love had stored its sweetest memories ; besides, she liked the definitely masculine atmosphere, the smell of pipes, all the male forms of untidiness which crammed up the place. But her chief reason was that, Irons being away, Frank might feel lonely on his first return—a domestic streak was woven into her soul's complexity, and she loved to make tea for her lover and toast his muffin, and afterwards when he settled down to work, to sit on the hearth at his feet and mend his quill, and forget that she herself had done better work than he had ever done or was ever likely to do.

They ran upstairs, laughing and chattering, and Rita took off her bonnet and shawl in the bedroom.

" It's nice to see your dear old chimneys again," she said, kneeling on the bed and flattening her nose against the window. " Do you know, Frank, I'm afraid I'm cockney to the bone ! I'm delighted to be back in London —to see the smoke and smell the soot."

" But you were happy at the Crown——"

" Happy ! " She slipped her arm round his neck as he knelt beside her. " My happiness was you."

" I should like to take you away into the very heart of the country, into a little tiny house of our own, and keep you there for ever."

" Thanks. I'd rather be with you here, counting your chimney-pots. Look, the big red one by the gable has had a piece knocked out of it—and those geraniums in the attic over there are new. I like your garden, Master Frank—better than the garden at the Crown. I like the way you grow chimney-pots all of a row."

They knelt together on the bed, their faces pressed against the window, chattering and peering like a couple of children, till they were startled by a loud cough in the study.

" Lor ! what's that ? " cried Rita.

" It must be Stephen."

" I thought he wasn't coming back till Thursday. He should have let us know, then we shouldn't have kept him waiting for his tea. We're coming, Steve ; don't be cross ! " And, leaping across the bed, she ran upstairs, Frank at her heels.

In the doorway she stopped abruptly, and as he looked over her shoulder, he saw, to his horror, not Irons, but David Coalbran. He sat stiffly, still buttoned up in his great-coat, his hat beside him on the table.

" Hullo," said Frank awkwardly.

" Evenun," said Coalbran. " I'm up in Lunnon fur the Islington Show, so thought as how I'd pay you a visit. The woman downstairs said as you wur out of town, but ud be back if I waited."

" I hope you haven't waited long—let me introduce you. . . . Mr. Coalbran, Miss Simons," he added, realising the inevitable.

Coalbran bowed rather surlily, as Rita came forward with her most charming smile.

" I'm so pleased to meet you, Mr. Coalbran. Frank has often spoken of you. I'm afraid you've had a poor

welcome, but Mrs. Hobbs never told us there was any one waiting, or we'd have come to you earlier. I'm so glad to meet one of Frank's old friends."

Coalbran again mumbled of Islington Show.

" Let's have a fire," said Rita, " as it's such a wet evening —then I can boil the kettle at once."

She knelt down on the hearthrug, and began to light the sticks. Frank came forward and enquired after Luke and Tom and Mrs. Coalbran, leaving out Maggie with a pointedness which he felt must strike even the leathery observation of his visitor ; but he was quite unable to say her name. He wished Rita would not be so infernally hospitable. He thought that he might have been able to account for her to Coalbran if she had not insisted on doing the honours of the place. He realised that Rita probably saw his embarrassment, and had stepped forward to take the burden of entertainment off his shoulders. But he was angry with her—she ought to have seen that one could not be as unguarded and careless of appearances with Kentish Coalbran as with the frequenters of her " salon." They had neither of them taken much trouble to hide their attachment from Leigh or Irons or any of the others—but Rita ought to have seen that Coalbran was different.

With a frown he watched her light the fire and lay the tea-table, and do all the little things which used to charm him with their intimacy, but which this afternoon filled him with irritation and foreboding. Coalbran would of course tell every one at Moon's Green—he would tell how he had found in Frank's lodgings a young and pretty woman, with whom he was on the friendliest terms ; and Maggie would sit listening, her big soft mouth tremulous at his treachery, her eyes reproachful as if they saw in vision that dusky yard with the watery green sky behind the barns, and the boy who with his lips on hers had sworn that he loved her and would come back.

Perhaps the worst part of it was that he had not broken his word. He loved her, and he would come back. That was as true now as it had been true then. Nothing had

altered it—not his most passionate moment with Rita. He saw it clearly now. But Maggie would not see it. She would think he did not love her any more—any woman would.

He sat glumly during the meal, while Rita, always ready to please anything male, charmed Coalbran out of his shyness and silence, and soon had him talking eagerly about the Islington Show, describing to her the stallion he had bought, and confounding her with technicalities which she received with smiles of perfect comprehension. Once Frank opened his mouth to make an irrelevant remark about escorting her back to Corner Street, just to show David that Bury Street was not her home ; and on another occasion he dragged in a reference to Mrs. Simons, but he was aware all the time of the ineffectiveness of these sallies. Even if Coalbran was so diffident of his own worldly wisdom as to put down Rita's unexplained presence to nothing worse than " queer furrin' ways," it was perfectly obvious from her manner that she and Frank were sweethearts. Throughout tea he was conscious of her beaming, tender eye, of her care for his comfort, her concern at his want of appetite, all her dozen little motherly ways, which he had used to find so sweet, but which now struck him as glaring and officious.

Meantime, while he froze, Coalbran thawed. Rita's charm and sympathy ended by completely melting him out of his gruffness. He was soon unrecognisable, chatting and guffawing, more expansive than Frank had seen him anywhere but in the public-house. He ate an enormous tea, and did not rise to go till after seven, when he reckoned he had better be getting back to his inn, where he was to sup with a Sussex farmer he had met at the show.

On the way downstairs, Frank racked his brains for some explanation which could prevent Rita being described to Maggie as his sweetheart.

On the doorstep Coalbran became sly. He dug Frank in the ribs.

" That's an unaccountable pretty liddle lady upstairs," he said.

" She's a friend—a literary friend."

" Ha ! ha ! " laughed Coalbran ; " you doan't expect me to believe she's no more'n that—you lucky feller ! Reckon as how she's the most dentical liddle lady as I've met a dunna-manny year. She's genteel, too, and if you marry her——"

" Look here," cried Frank desperately, " don't you be telling them all at Moon's Green that I'm in love or going to be married. Because I'm not. Things are different here from what they are at home, you know. Men and girls can be friends without being sweethearts."

David laid his finger against his nose, and walked on rumbling with laughter. Frank gloomily went upstairs, realising that his " explanation " had fallen flat.

§ 13

Rita sprang forward to meet him as he came into the study, and taking his serious face between her hands, kissed it tenderly.

" Frank, I flatter myself I've made a conquest. Your surly friend went off quite—how shall I say ?—affable."

" He did."

" He seems to have passed on his grumps to you. What's the matter, boy ? "

He pulled his face out of the cup of her caressing hands, and leaned gloomily against the fireplace.

" Why don't you understand things ? " he said at last.

" What things ? "

" That I didn't want Coalbran to know about you and me—and you've given us away."

She did not speak for a moment—they were the first cold words she had ever had from him. Then—

" I'm sorry," she said rather slowly, " but I never thought about it. I simply saw there was a very gruff, bearish person, who was cross because he had been kept waiting, and had to be made pleased with you and me and

himself. I saw you were annoyed—I—thought it was because we'd been interrupted on our first evening—so I did my best to come to the rescue and brighten things up."

She stood on the hearthrug, the firelight leaping up and down her skirts, and for the first time Frank thought that she wore too brightly coloured clothes and too many bangles, that her hands were too incapable and luxurious, and that he disliked the definitely Jewish cast of her features. He recalled Maggie's hardy, sunburnt little face, with the tilted nose and the wide mouth, her ringless hard-working hands. . . .

Then a sick shame overtook him, as he thought of his ingratitude to the woman who for the last three months had given him her love and beauty and sympathy, her encouragement and inspiration, her whole self without grudge. After all, he had never told her about Maggie—it was his one reserve—and if he lost Maggie for ever he would have no one to blame but himself. Why, it was only this very evening that he had realised he did not want to lose her—that he had not definitely given her up when he took another woman to his heart. Rita had not been indiscreet—her conduct was always modest and well-bred; she had not displayed—she had merely made no effort to conceal. Her mistake had been a failure to realise that there were people who would not look upon her love as she looked upon it, as a joyful and natural thing.

Stung with remorse, he drew her into his arms, surrendering once more to her silken, exotic charm—which was the feminine attire of a man's generosity and staunchness. He murmured incoherent words of penitence against her breast. . . .

§ 14

It was some days before he conquered a quite unreasonable impulse to write to Maggie. He entirely realised the folly of it—he could not explain Rita, nor could he, without disloyalty to Rita, write in the loving strain of his earlier

letters. Yet he wanted to write; he wanted to make some effort, no matter how futile, to keep himself in Maggie's good graces. But he was able to resist the craving, and in time it passed. He had succeeded very comfortably in forgetting Maggie for three months, and he might as well forget her for good. After all, their correspondence had been a failure, and it would seem as if before he forgot her, she had forgotten him. He must learn to look upon their love as a mere boy-and-girl affair, a premature budding inevitably to be nipped by separation. He remembered its beginnings by his father's open grave; perhaps it had been merely one of those farewell mocks with which life and nature had pursued their fugitive beyond death.

So he put her aside, refused to speculate as to her reception of Coalbran's news, and plunged back once more into his work and his passion for Rita. He now went daily to the *Courier* offices, where his tasks were various. He was not so much a journalist as a confidential clerk. He wrote a bi-weekly agricultural column, his experience of farm life standing him in good stead, and he had always to be ready to turn out an occasional paragraph on any subject under the sun; but his chief job was preparing the paper for publication, correcting proofs, sorting advertisements, keeping accounts. He found Cremer a pleasant man to work with, indefatigable and considerate. Of course his position was a poor one, and his salary poorer still, but he was now quite willing to own himself a failure as a journalist. Thanks to Mr. Bellack, he had a sound, if unspontaneous, style, but he lacked fluency and snap; in a word, "ginger." Also when reporting an incident, he noted only those aspects which had interested him personally, seeming unable to realise the attitude of the average half-educated reader. He had a vivid imagination, but it was self-centred and erratic, of so little use in his particular line of business that he often found it best to throttle it altogether, with the result that his style was mechanical and flat.

He now put his whole future into the manuscript he had sent to Bentley's, and it was a really severe blow to him when it came back. The publishers wrote that they were indebted to Miss Simons for her introduction, and no doubt the book showed promise, but it was not of a kind to appeal to the general public, so they must regretfully decline it. Rita was indignant—of course Frank's noble style and daring conceptions were not likely to win favour with the uncultured masses, but she thought that Bentley's might have risked small sales for the sake of a genuine artistic success. Frank felt dispirited; he had trusted to the publication of "The Farms of the Valley" to revive his literary self-esteem, also he had for the book that odd jealous paternal emotion authors so often feel; its rejection was a wound and an offence. For some days he went about heavy-hearted as if from a bereavement, till his hopes had risen to the conviction that it would be accepted by Chatto & Windus, to whom he had sent it next.

After a time, it was back again, with a mere printed refusal, and the same treatment was meted out by Isbister, Bell & Dalby, and Sampson Low. Frank began to think regretfully of Bentley's courteous note, to regard it as a favour only a little inferior to acceptance, till he suddenly realised it was most likely due to Rita's introduction. They liked her and admired her work, so treated her favourite with especial gentleness.

In time this made him oddly resentful. Rita was now at work on a new novel, which was not ony surle of publication, but eagerly awaited by her publishers. Her last had been quite a success, even the porridge-eating critics of the *Edinburgh Review* had praised it, and her name was being mentioned with those of Amelia Opie, Florence Marryat and Harriet Martineau. Some of the prejudice against women writers was dying out among the general public, but Frank found that in himself it was developing. He felt sore if Rita left him early to go back to her work, and instead of being pleased when she brought him reviews

or repeated praises, he had to struggle with a sense of injury and repulsion, which he realised all the time was unjust. He generally managed to conceal it, but he knew he was not invariably successful, for in time Rita ceased talking about her work or showing him criticisms.

He blamed himself for this—he knew it had not always been so. In the first months of their love he had entirely lost his prejudices, and he realised that their return was not due any more to the old conviction, but to a new factor which had arisen—jealousy. He was jealous that she, a woman, should succeed, where he failed. And yet he loved her; she herself was as adorable as ever, it was only her work that he hated. She was wise, and hid her work away. There was now a whole tract of her life into which he did not enter.

§ 15

One day late in October, Rita was making tea for Frank in the study. Irons was out, hawking a translation. He had lately discovered Stendhal, and was trying to force him on a British public whose ideal was Charles Mackay. Rita crouched on the hearthrug, her amber-coloured dress glowing in the flames, her hair falling straight and sheeny over her back. Frank loved her hair, which was abundant, black and rather coarse, after the manner of her race; and when she came to him she would unfasten it and let him play with the heavy rope-like strands, which he would stroke and twist with a boyish diffidence and wonder.

"Look, Frank," she said suddenly, "there's a letter under the door."

"That must be the post—and no 'Farms of the Valley,' for a wonder, or Mrs. Hobbs would have handed it in."

"Are you expecting it back from Constable's already?"

"Experientia docet."

"Hark to my inspired ploughboy talking Latin! Go and pick up your letter—it may be an acceptance."

" It may be an invitation from the Queen to have dinner at Buckingham Palace——"

He crossed the room and picked up the letter which showed a corner under the door. The handwriting was Mr. Bellack's. It was some time since he had heard from the parson, and he tore the envelope with eagerness.

" Dear Frank,

" There has been a gap in our correspondence, but for that you must blame a sudden outbreak among my parishioners of getting married and buried—harvest money accounts for the marriages, harvest suppers for the burials, I suppose. Why didn't you come to Maggie's wedding last week ? I expected you—another reason why I didn't write. I am sure she will be very happy with Harman, whose rather strict and gloomy manner conceals an excellent heart. I'm glad he didn't take his first ' no ' for an answer.

" . . . Since writing the above I have met Maggie, and hear to my surprise that you have never been told of the marriage. I don't know how it is, as she and Harman settled things last July ; I fear you have offended her in some way—she thinks you have forgotten her for your new London friends, which I'm sure is not the case. Do write and tell her so, for you and she are childhood's friends, and I should not like any misunderstanding to come between you.

" How are you after another hot hot summer in town ? I am rejoiced to hear you have left that abominable paper —it was fast driving me to join the Puseyites, which I wish to avoid until my Bishop does likewise. I've a feeling, Frank, that in time this Puseyism will have us all—but that is looking rather far ahead, and does not interest you in the least.

" Let me hear from you soon—and tell me if you think we shall have war with Russia.

" Yours,

" Arthur Bellack."

Frank's fist slowly crushed the letter, as he stood rigidly staring ahead of him into blankness. Then he felt his limbs grow weak, his heart turn sick, and he collapsed into a chair, his arms spread on the table, his face hidden against his elbow.

"My darling boy—what is it?—bad news?" Rita had sprung to his side, and he felt her soft arm against his neck. Unconsciously his shoulders hunched against her, and she drew back.

Then he suddenly stiffened into self-control, and handed her the letter. He felt he could not find words to explain what had happened. It was not till this very moment that he had realised how definitely, if unconsciously, he had counted on the impermanence of his affair with Rita, how he had always meant to fulfil in the end his promise to Maggie and "come back." Now return and expiation were beyond his power. Maggie was gone for ever—his unworthiness had lost her to him. And he loved her—he would always love her. She was the one woman in his life who truly and permanently mattered. Her face rose before him, broad and brown and tender, he saw her wide sweet lips which seemed as if they met with difficulty over her big white teeth, he heard her gentle, drawling voice, smelt the sweet dairy smell of her cotton gown and milky fingers. . . . He had so completely forgotten Rita that he started when she spoke.

"Frank—I don't understand. What does all this mean? Why are you so upset?"

He realised that in her state of unenlightenment the letter would only add to her perplexity. Why had he never told her about Maggie? He had been a fool from the beginning.

"Is it that Maggie Coalbran is married?" she continued, and her voice shook a little. "What difference can that make to you?"

He was at a loss how to reply. He saw now how treacherously he had behaved towards Rita as well as towards Maggie. He ought to have told her about his

love—and yet, why should he? He had thought it at an end, buried and forgotten, and he had shrunk from the pain of speaking of the dead. There had been that momentary hesitation caused by Coalbran's visit, but that too had disappeared. He had thought himself all Rita's—now he saw that nothing vital of himself ever had been hers. His senses had been attracted by her beauty and her charm, his gratitude had been stirred by her help and friendliness, and above all the call of spring, of youth, of adventure, of desire had drawn him out of his faithfulness to the simple woman at home—but the whole time his heart had been Maggie's, just as the heart of a traveller in some beautiful southern country belongs, in spite of the flowers and sunshine, to the mists of his native land.

"Rita," he faltered, "forgive me."

She swallowed before she spoke, and her face was very white.

"Do you mean that you—you care for this Maggie Coalbran?"

He nodded.

"Then what excuse can you make for not telling me?" Her voice suddenly became hard.

"I thought she had forgotten me. . . . I—I thought I had forgotten her."

"All the same, you should have told me. I'd have acted differently if I'd known."

His anger rose.

"Why should I have told you? I thought it was over."

"You must have had your doubts—sometimes, or you wouldn't be so miserable now she's married."

He remembered one or two distinct occasions on which he had "had doubts," and was silent.

She reflected a moment, then said—

"Was that why you were so cross when Mr. Coalbran came?"

"Don't!"

"Oh, Frank—I wish you had told me! You will hate me now, and that will be terrible."

"Yes. I wish I had told you—it would have been better. But I didn't know my own feelings, and you were like a flood to me. I wanted happiness and sunshine and colour—it was springtime." . . .

The tears came into her eyes.

"I know—I understand. Oh, my poor Frank, I understand—and I'm so sorry. I'm not angry with you really. It was only the shock of hearing this for the first time." . . .

She came towards him, holding out her arms, but he drew back.

"I can't, dear—not now I *know* I love Maggie."

She began to cry.

"But she's gone—she's married some one else."

"I can't help that."

He stood with his arms folded, his chin sunk on his breast. Rita leaned against the table, mopping her eyes with a little scented handkerchief.

"Perhaps she never cared for you."

"She did care for me."

"But you said you thought she had forgotten you."

"That was because she wrote so seldom, poor little soul! She had scarcely learned to write—and I expected long letters every week."

"Were you engaged to her?"

"Practically."

"Oh, Frank, how could you have hidden it from me? It was unfair."

He turned on her angrily. He was shocked and unstrung, and once more he felt that sudden repulsion from her exotic, Jewish personality, her gay gown, her sensuous hands, her streaming, abandoned-looking hair.

"For God's sake stop reproaching me!" he cried. "'How could you! how could you!' You've said it fifty times, and I'm sick. There's no earthly reason why I should have told you. It was nothing to do with you."

"It was. I loved you, and I thought you loved me."

"I did love you, but in a different way."

Her white face crimsoned feverishly.

"Why don't you say straight out that you loved me only with your body, but this Maggie with your heart and soul?"

"I didn't mean that."

"You did—and I've suspected it all along. You take no interest in me apart from the pleasure I give your senses. You hate my mind and my work—you're jealous."

He was stung to the quick, for he knew her taunt was true.

"Don't lose your temper," he said furiously.

She twisted up her hair, and began bundling it back into its net.

"I'm going, Frank. You've treated me most unfairly, for you've let me make you miserable—I who loved you. If I'd known there was the ghost of another woman in your life I shouldn't have done as I did. I made sure you were fancy free, and that in practically flinging myself at your head I was acting for your happiness as well as my own. And now you're wretched, and it's my fault—and yet it's your fault that it's my fault." . . .

"You don't seem particularly sorry for me."

She stood still for a moment, her arms lifted to her head. Then she said slowly—

"You won't let me be sorry for you. That's what shows me . . ." a sob cut up her words. She seized her bonnet, tying it viciously and askew. "Please fetch me a cab."

§ 16

For the rest of that evening Frank sat over the fire, flabby, crumpled and motionless, like a man who has received a blow, for in one stunning shock he had realised the twin facts that he still loved Maggie and that his affair with Rita was at an end. One necessarily involved the other, for though he saw clearly that Rita was not to blame for what had happened, he knew that he could not possibly stay on the old terms with her now that his whole heart was full of Maggie. Whether this would have been the

case had he heard of the marriage six months ago he could not say. Perhaps Rita had been right when she had declared then that nothing could part them, but he remembered the end of her sentence—"When the time comes—anything." They had arrived now at the "anything." He was forced up against the secondary realisation that a smaller matter than his love for Maggie could have divided them. In the painful clarity which often follows a shock, he saw that for a long time his devotion to Rita had been straining—he remembered the sudden crude repulsion which had seized him on the night of Coalbran's visit, and there had been other, lesser occasions; and there had been, worst of all, the callous growth of professional jealousy, a teasing consciousness of her mental superiority, which, combined with the contrast of her femininity and luxuriousness, had been irritating him into a definite antagonism.

He saw it clearly now—his love for Rita had been long a-dying, though as the most showy, rapturous, passionate part of it had been the last to fail, he had not noticed the mortality beneath—as the decay of a tree may pass unseen until the surface bark has yielded to the internal gnawing. He wondered whether her love for him was also dead. Possibly the shock of this sudden coldness and injustice had killed it . . . he hoped so, and he felt so. Rita was not the type to love unloved. She would take her gifts elsewhere—pour over some other man the spikenard of her beauty and friendship. A horrible pang smote him—the pang of his own ingratitude. He had not given Rita one-third of what she had given him, and now he had broken with her roughly, made her miserable. He had hated her because she was a blameless cause of his misfortune. The blame belonged only to himself. He saw that not even Maggie was to blame. He had often reproached her in his heart for her caution, the careful prudence which would not move an unassured step. Now he saw that he could not blame her for that—it was her nature, just as it was Rita's nature to plunge forward

recklessly towards what she wanted. Rita was like some eager foreign soil, bringing forth fruit luxuriantly out of its abundance, and Maggie was some slow-ripening Kentish field, where nature gives only in piecemeal doles after infinite toil. . . . Maggie seemed to him now to stand linked up with the very niggard soil of Kent, from which he had impatiently turned to Rita's warm lavishness, there to bask till he was surfeited and pined for those grudging fields—too late.

He should not have so easily doubted Maggie; he should have made her one more appeal, have gone down to see her, even, before he definitely told himself she had forgotten him. Now he came to think of it, it was odd that the very circumstance which should have confirmed him in his doubts should have convinced him, on the contrary, that she had been true, till the news of his unfaithfulness broke her faith. But he was quite sure that Maggie had turned to Harman only because he, Frank, had failed her. She had definitely refused him in February, and hers was not a changeable mind; besides, her final acceptance coincided exactly with the probable time of Coalbran's revelation. Also the fact that he had had no news of her intentions, no invitation to the wedding, pointed ominously to pique and sorrow on her part; she had either told her parents of his behaviour, or so arranged things that he should not be invited to the ceremony—otherwise, he found it strange to account for such neglect. It was quite probable, he bitterly told himself, that she was pleased to marry Harman, and would be happy with him—all the same, he felt convinced that had it not been for her discovery of his unfaithfulness she would be still unwed.

These wretched thoughts tormented him till he heard the footsteps of returning Irons, whereupon he ran to his bedroom, and locked himself in. He did not go to bed, but spent several hours in attempts to write to Rita. His one idea was reparation, and though his only reparation to Maggie could be silence, he felt that to Rita he must

write. It was a difficult letter, for though he wanted to beg her pardon, to abase himself at her feet, he also wanted to make it clear that they could not continue lovers. The bond between them had been snapped, and it would be an affront to both of them to patch it, even if he had been capable of doing so with his heart full of Maggie. He tore up several efforts, then at last in despair decided to send a copy of his first attempt—everything he had written since seemed only more muddled and unsatisfactory.

He went out to post it shortly before breakfast. The streets were slimed with mud, and a dirty sky sagged above the house-tops squirting rain. Frank felt dazed and heavy after his sleepless night, and his mind was jumbled with broken memories—all the happiness that Rita had brought him mixed up with the pain, all the sweetness with the bitterness, the good with the bad. As he came to the pillar-box, he saw a girl posting a letter ; she looked worn and tired, and he wondered if she, too, was making an end, if she had crowned herself with rosebuds in the spring only to see them wither when autumn came, and leave a crown of thorns. . . .

§ 17

His answer came the next morning, and luckily he was alone. He tore the envelope nervously. It was scented with *peau d'Espagne,* but inside was one of the sheets of foolscap on which Rita wrote her novels. The contrast expressed her.

" My dear Frank,

" I had your letter this evening. It was kind of you to write, for now we shall part with nothing sore between us. I think you are quite right about our separating. I turned things over in my mind last night, and I have come to the same conclusion as you. Our love has been so happy and so sweet that I think it far better to end it before it fades and sours—let us have only happy

memories of each other. Yesterday's quarrel showed us that we were beginning to drift apart, so I think we will be wise to make a clean, swift cut, and not let things hang on till we're both sick. For, as I told you, lovers must part, and how nice to part friends! I'm sorry, Frank, if I was 'aggravating' last night. I know I nagged, but then I thought you were unjust, and I'm a woman, in spite of having unsexed myself by writing novels. Perhaps nagging is the last vestige of my sex to remain!

"Oh, my dear, now I am writing, I want to tell you how sorry I am for the pain I have unwittingly brought into your life. I didn't let you see clearly enough yesterday how sorry I felt. I was all sore and ruffled, but now I want to ask you to forgive me for having been the unconscious means of your losing the woman you love. How I wish I could give her back to you! But perhaps she is not gone for ever—the future may hold her yet.

"Let me hear what happens to you—even if you don't want to see me at present, perhaps we may meet again later on. I am going to tell you something which will surprise you. I have made up my mind to accept Isadore Cohen. He has been asking me to marry him for years, and now I really think it is the best thing I can do. I am fond of him, and he is devoted and faithful. I shall make him a good and loyal wife—have no doubt of that. And I shall be happy—have no doubt of that, either. Oh, Frank, I am tired of the dusty street—I don't seem to have really helped any one much or to have done anything worth doing. My work is—mediocre. I could never have made a career out of it; my career was loving, and my work got in the way of that. Why, it even came between you and me. How much better for me to be a *real* woman since I can't be a man. Up till now I've been half and half, a kind of shandygaff, and one side of me has always stood in the way of the other. Now the author-side of me is dead, and I'm just a comfortable Jewess, who means to be a happy wife and mother.

"Just this, to end. Frank—if you ever loved me ever

so little, if you ever had one happy hour with me, if I ever gave you delight, if you have a single sweet memory of me, *do not regret our love.* Even though it has brought you sorrow, do not regret it, and do not blame—any one, least of all yourself. Don't say ' if I'd done so and so, so and so would not have happened '—it might. Anyhow, there's no use thinking about it. For a time we gave each other perfect happiness, and I could not bear to think you were going about wishing you had never met me. Excuse me writing as if I was on my deathbed. I'm going to be married, which perhaps comes to the same thing. I look forward one day to seeing you famous. You have wonderful gifts, and I wish you the best of luck—

" For you have made me very happy, dear.

" RITA."

§ 18

Before Frank had time to form any clear thought out of the chaos of his mind, the door opened noisily, and Irons came in, laden with papers and books. He at once saw Rita's handwriting on the envelope which Frank had tossed down on the table, and he suddenly looked nervous.

" Have—have you heard the news ? " he asked, after some hesitation.

" About Rita ?—yes." Frank was surprised at his own calm voice.

" She's engaged to Cohen."

" So I hear. She has just written to tell me."

Irons's embarrassment was evidently succeeded by curiosity as to the origin of his friend's coolness, but he said nothing more.

Frank strolled over to the window, and stood staring out into the fog. He remembered how the fog had lain like a muddy broth between the houses that afternoon of Rita's first visit. He found his mind dully concentrated upon it, taking refuge in its thick soupiness from the battery of tormenting thoughts within his brain. Suddenly Irons's voice seemed to come from very far off.

" Oh, by the way, I met the parcel post on the stairs, and here's something for you."

Frank held out his hand for the inevitable " Farms of the Valley."

" God ! " he said gloomily.

" Bear up—it's the fortune of war."

" I don't know where to send it now. It's been all round the town."

Irons looked at him with a queer embarrassment in his eyes.

" Can you advise me ? " suggested Frank.

" M'yes, I could advise you, but I doubt if you'd be pleased with my advice."

" Why ? "

" You see, I should advise you to throw it in there——" and Irons pointed to the waste-paper basket.

Frank coloured up to his eyes.

" You mean it's worthless."

" Well—not that exactly. But I shall be monstrously surprised if you ever get it taken."

" Why, pray ? "

Irons faltered and floundered.

" It's—it's—I don't know how to describe it—but you know that kind of handwriting which seems bold and clear, and yet when you come to look into it is quite unreadable ? "

" Well, what of it ? "

" Your stuff's like that. It has all the outward appearance of genius, but when you come to look into it, it's not even mediocre."

" Is this your own idea ? "

" Mine and everybody's. We've talked about you a lot, you know, and I've met Isbister's reader and one or two other people who've seen the manuscript, and they all agree you'd better stick to journalism."

" But I've been told I'm no good at journalism."

" No more you are—but you can make a living out of it, anyway. You won't get a penny out of your other stuff."

" Why did nobody tell me this ? "

" We didn't want to meddle—we knew you'd find out for yourself soon enough. Besides, you'd never have believed us with Rita Simons for ever dinning into your ears that you were a genius."

" Well, there must be something in my work, or she wouldn't have thought so much about it."

Frank felt hot and injured ; Irons gathered boldness.

" My dear chap, that's just the point. From her childhood it's been Rita's job to convince people who haven't a spark of talent that they're heaven-born geniuses. And the trouble is she makes one believe it. She made me believe it—and look at me now. Perhaps you've wondered why all the men you meet at her house are to be heard of nowhere else, why all her ' coming people ' never get anywhere. It's simply for this reason, that not one of 'em has any ability except what her imagination creates. I own that for a time I thought you were an exception, but now I see you're not. You've been well trained, and you've got imagination, but you don't seem able to combine the two. When you use your training, as in newspaper work, you let your imagination go, and the whole thing's lifeless. When you use your imagination, then somehow you seem to get intoxicated, and the whole thing's mess—. I don't want to be rude, but your ' imaginative ' writing reminds me of a drunken man being sick. A man who wants to write must be able to digest life—with you it's simply turned your stomach and gone to your head. Perhaps when you've knocked about more——"

" Why didn't you give me this harangue a bit earlier ? "

" I tell you I didn't like to interfere while you were so thick with Rita. I knew you'd find out yourself in time—we all do. Of course I'm sorry if it's a blow, and perhaps I ought to have spoken before this—but you wouldn't have listened to me or any one while Rita was thinking so much of you. Her enthusiasm is so marvellous that one ends in believing in oneself. She's never happy unless

she's impressing on some poor fellow that he's Solomon and Shakespeare rolled into one. Why, probably at this very moment she's persuading Cohen that he could write an epic if he would only try. And the pity of it is that she herself is miles ahead of the lot of us, and yet she won't see it; she neglects her own first-rate gifts to encourage quite imaginary ones in other people. It's the way she's made, I suppose."

"Yes," said Frank, "I suppose it is."

His world was crumbling away, the solid foundations of his life—his belief in himself as a writer and as a lover. Now he knew he was only a failure—as both.

"But Richard believed in me!" he cried suddenly.

"Yes, for a time, but he soon saw he'd made a mistake—your journalism gave way first, and then he saw your other stuff was no use. Of course he's immensely sorry for having persuaded you to come up to town and try your luck; still, I don't suppose you regret it; you've had a good time," . . .

"I—I believe in my work. The bad journalism I can understand, but the other—I felt it was in me." . . .

"Perhaps it is in you, only you haven't succeeded in bringing it out yet. Look here, Rainger, old boy, take my advice, and keep on with the *Courier*, and if you like, I'll put you into the way of editing some school-books. You know Latin, and I know a chap who wants them done." . . .

Frank shuddered.

For a moment there was silence in the yellow study with the peeling walls. Rainger stood with his back to Irons, staring out of the window at the fog. Then suddenly he burst out laughing.

"That's right," said Stephen, evidently relieved.

§ 19

For some days Frank went about stupidly, like a man recovering after a carouse. He seemed to have no ideas,

only emotions, and these were cloudy and windy, a gale blowing in darkness. He plodded at his clerkly work on the *Courier*, and in the evenings he sat with his pipe and his glass, and listened to the old discussions trundling round and round the old themes—Currer Bell, American fiction, the births and the deaths of newspapers, the blowing and pricking of reputational bladders. He joined in them too, and smoked and drank more than was good for him.

At the end of a week two things stood out clearly: one was the passing of his love for Rita, the other was the deepening of his love for Maggie. It was strange how from the first he was able to talk about Rita quite simply and naturally, to think of her without either pain or joy, to discuss her prospects with Cohen—indeed if she had not gone with her mother to Manchester, to stay with Cohen's people, he felt he could have met her without uneasiness.

On the other hand his love for Maggie became more tender and remorseful. He longed, yet dreaded, to see her. He brooded over her chances of happiness. He knew little of Harman, who was a good deal older than he, and inclined to be reserved and hermitical. Frank had always looked on him as a confirmed bachelor—and he gathered that his marriage was surprising the whole neighbourhood. Of course the Coalbrans would be pleased, as Mockbeggar was a prosperous and important farm, of more consequence than Moon's Green. Frank wondered if they knew of his love for Maggie—probably, at one time they had suspected it. He had no word from them, but was not surprised, as Maggie was the only one of the family who could read or write. He wondered if he would ever hear from her again, ever see her again, or the Coalbrans, or Moon's Green. He longed to visit the Isle of Oxney, but at the same time felt a strange, stinging reluctance. He felt that he dared not see Maggie at present, and also the Coalbrans might not care to have him—they might know how he had treated her, or they might feel hurt

at his not having been down to see them since he left Kent.

It was an odd thing that while the vivid colours, the beaming lights of his love for Rita had faded from his mind like sunset glow, the dim pale tints of his love for Maggie remained fixed as the sky. Though he had lost the magic intoxicating moments that he and Rita had shared—the voluptuous domesticity of the yellow study, the drowsy, lime-sweet passion of the inn near Guildford —he had clear-cut both in memory and emotion all the little joys and troubles of his and Maggie's childhood together, their kisses, their quarrels, their games and make-believes, their comings together and driftings apart —up to their great adventurous tramp to Cranbrook Circus, and then on to when he had first loved her with a man's love beside his father's grave. . . .

He tried to put them from him, he tried to cheer and embattle himself in safe memories of the once-dangerous Rita—but it was no use. He pined for Maggie as for the fields of Kent.

Early in December the *Courier* suddenly perished, and Frank found himself once more without a billet. He thought that he would now try for a regular clerkship, on the strength of his experience in Cremer's office. He would rather earn his living in that humble way than as a fifth-rate journalist. As for "The Farms of the Valley," it provided a brief but excellent substitute for firewood.

True to his promise, Irons got him some educational work, but this did not take up much of his time. Until he found a new place, which, with his qualifications, was not likely to be soon, he had the middle part of the day empty, the dreary drizzling noons of December. Restless, anxious, a prey to unhappy thought, he did not care to stay at home. He wandered to and fro about town, exploring strange corners, roaming down new streets. He tramped to the great wharfs below the Pool, and saw the masts of the shipping bristle against the clouds. He saw the dirty

little smoke-jacks and high unwieldy paddle-boxes of the Atlantic steamers, and sometimes he wondered if it would not be better to sell all that he had, borrow what still lacked, and steam across the ocean to that new Western Country, towards which broken men were beginning to turn their eyes.

PART III

THE FOOLISH LOVERS

§ 1

EARLY the next year, there was a break in the monotone of Frank's affairs. He had a letter from Mr. Bellack telling him that Luke Coalbran was very ill, probably dying, and asking him to come down to Kent.

"The old man wants to see you. He has always loved you, almost as a son."

Frank's heart was queerly touched and disquieted. It hurt him to think of hale Luke Coalbran, whom he had always looked on as a type of vigour and stoutness, lying weak on a sick-bed, mown down untimely. On the other hand he was rejoiced that Luke had asked for him. Bellack went on to say how pleased the Coalbrans would be to have him with them again, showing the false ground of his suspicions of their ill-feeling. They obviously did not know about him and Maggie, and regarded his long absence not as an affront but a misfortune. Now they asked him to come to them at a time when men's hearts open only to those very dear. He was flattered and comforted.

So deep was his pleasure at the Coalbrans' invitation, that it was scarcely troubled by the thought of meeting Maggie. Besides, he was now growing steadier in his attitude towards her. His resolve not to blame and not to regret had brought him quiet. He felt that he could meet Maggie with good-will and calm.

He had not yet found a berth, so there was no reason why he should not leave town at once. Bellack's letter

had stirred up an anxious love of Luke Coalbran, which urged him to prompt action, and it had also waked all his old homesickness, the fullness of his longing for the fields of Kent. He could scarcely wait to pack a few things in his valise while Irons looked out a train.

"I shan't take more than my brushes and a change of clothes," said Frank. "Most likely I'll be back within the week."

He caught the afternoon train to Hastings. The railroad now ran as far as Rye, so quite possibly he would be able to ride out to Wittersham that night. His last glimpse of London was a grey river oddly streaked with sunshine, as the fog ebbed from it, then rolled down on it once more. The city passed—yellowish suburbs came—then in their turn passed, scattering into the fields.

In spite of the sad errand on which he was bound, Frank's spirits rose as the train bumped and rattled between the green banks, where the wet earth and the wet grass steamed and glimmered in the wintry sunshine. He snuffed up the Kentish wind, sooty as it was with smoke. At last the country began to grow familiar. He saw the red, jumbled roofs of Robertsbridge, with Salehurst tower, and the shallows of the Rother—Whatlington in the valley, and Battle on the hill—the new town of St. Leonards with its promenade a-building—Hastings slabbing stucco on its tiles—and at last old Rye, grass-grown, brine-salted.

He hired a horse at the London Trader, and rode off to Wittersham, his valise strapped on behind. It was about six o'clock, a dark, frosty night, windless and cold. There was no moon, but the sky was a-dazzle with stars, sharp, winking points of light on the spread blackness. He could pick out the outlines of hedges and hills only by their bite into the stars. The country was silent, there was none of the murmur and rustle of a night in June—only once, as he passed Bannister's Town, a dog's bark tore the wintry air, and at Iden singing came from the inn.

Frank rode into Kent with a happiness which was almost exaltation. The sense of home-coming was upon him like

a benediction, though he saw nothing of the country through which he travelled but a blackness spotted with the scattered lights of farms, heard nothing but the clop-clip of his horse's hoofs upon the frost-bound road.

When he came to Baron's Grange the dark was broken by a faint gleam—the sheen of the floods which filled the Rother Valley; the Wittersham Road was nearly a-wash by the Nether Bridge, but soon it was sloping up the scarp of the Isle of Oxney past Birdskitchen and Chapel Bank to Wittersham Stocks. A new valley now gaped on the right, the valley of the Reading Sewer, also flooded with the overflow, covered to-night by a thin skin of ice. In winter the Isle of Oxney was an island in the correct geographical sense of the word.

Frank reached Moon's Green soon after eight. The place was smothered in darkness, and his rap on the door flung a hollow echo into the barns. For a while there was silence, then footsteps sounded far away, drawing nearer—then a light gleamed under the door, which at last opened to show Tom Coalbran, carrying a lamp.

"Lordy! It's Frank come back!" he cried.

"I heard from Mr. Bellack this morning—he said your father would like to see me."

"He's gone," said Tom, and began to blubber.

"Dead." . . .

"Died this arternoon, quiet as a baby. I'm just-about vrothered wud it all—Susie calving at the same time, and I to and fro lik' a shuttle 'twixt sick-room and stable. Fäather he asked arter her wud his last breath, and he didn't die till he heard as she and the calf wur säafe, nuther."

§ 2

Frank was stunned. In the joy of his home-coming he had not realised how much he had counted on seeing Luke, holding his huge hairy paw, and telling him of the regard and gratitude which had brought him all the way from London to his bedside. Now he saw him indeed—

Mrs. Coalbran would not spare him a view of " the carpse " —but it was a new Luke Coalbran, blanched and fined by death, not so remarkable for that wonderful bush of beard as for the pale, sharp features that stuck up from it—features that struck Frank as unlike the living Coalbran's in their refinement and nobility, for he had not known till then that death makes aristocrats of all.

" What was it ? " he asked Mrs. Coalbran.

" Rheumatic fever, doctor said. 'Twas the floods, he said, and the mists, and the damp earth. Oh, he suffered unaccountable in his böans, but he had peace at the last. He said to me when he wur suffering most larmentäable—' Lizzie,' said he, ' I'm glad as it's the öald earth's killed me. I've lived on her and worked on her and fed off her all my days, and now I'm dying of her and ull be buried in her. That's good.' "

Frank could not speak. He drew back the sheet over Coalbran's strangely noble face, and turned away.

His bed was made up in his father's old room, the big " best chamber " of Moon's Green. Mrs. Coalbran gave him bread and meat broth, and worn out with excitement, travel, and shock, he turned into bed. But he could not sleep. The rapt, unearthly quiet of the country kept him awake, as at first the rattle of the London streets had done.

§ 3

At the funeral it was inevitable that he should meet Maggie. She did not come to Moon's Green first, but drove straight from Mockbeggar with her husband. Looking across the grave, Frank saw her in her uncouth black. A crape veil hung over her bonnet, so that her face was hidden, but she had been unable to endure the confinement of her gloves, and had satisfied her sense of decorum by wearing only one of them ; so Frank saw her plump hand, pink with cold, and noted with a startled soreness her thick aggressive wedding-ring.

It was also inevitable that he should compare this

funeral with that earlier one at which his love for her was born, or rather was given the sacrament of its adult state. But then they had stood hand in hand beside the grave, and now the grave divided them. Maggie stood beside Harman, and Frank watched them nervously, trying to read by their few signs the temperature of their marriage. They seemed stiff and constrained, but that was probably the occasion and their awkward clothes.

At last the funeral was over, and the earth's vassal was left to perform his last service by nourishing her fertility with his dust. The party walked sedately home. Mr. Bellack joined Mrs. Coalbran and her sons, and Frank found himself walking between Maggie and her husband, while after them paced less privileged mourners. The rigidity of country etiquette forbade his escape. If he joined Mrs. Coalbran ahead, he was presuming ; if he hung back, and mixed with those behind, he showed himself insensible of his privileges. After all he must get used to meeting Maggie, for he was resolved not to stay away from Moon's Green again for so long.

Then suddenly, with a blink of embarrassment, he remembered that he had never congratulated her on her marriage. It would seem odd to make no reference to it, and yet how could he explain the months of silence he had let go by since he heard the news ? No more than she could explain why she had never told him of it. He decided that he must not meddle with the situation, unsatisfactory as it was. But the unspoken word lay like a grave between them.

Harman was not much help. Silent by nature, he was little use now, when emotion and shyness would be likely to increase his normal tendency. Frank made one or two feeble remarks about the weather, inquired after the spring sowings, asked Harman if he expected much from hops that year.

Suddenly Maggie said—

" You must come over and see us at Mockbeggar."

Frank mumbled an evasive reply.

" How long ull you be here ? " she continued.

" I—I'm not sure. I haven't decided yet. Not long."

He had meant to go home directly after the funeral, but that very morning Mrs. Coalbran had asked him to stay for at least another week. " You look unaccountable pale and Lunnony—you shud stay fur a blow of fresh air, surelye." And he had agreed, having nothing to call him back, and finding each day that the old farm grew more homely and more dear.

" Well, come before you go," said Maggie. " We'd be pleased if he cäum to supper, shudn't we, Harman ? "

Harman grunted not uncordially, and a few minutes later they arrived at the house.

To Frank's relief, he was not seated anywhere near Maggie for the funeral meal. He sat between Mr. Bellack and Tom Coalbran, and as she was on the same side of the table, he was not disquieted even by the sight of her. There was little conversation, the guests being busy with Mrs. Coalbran's beer and pies. The food was eaten almost ceremonially, as an act of respect to the dead and compliment to the living, in solemnity and silence.

When it was over, people began to go home. Farmers from High Tilt and Harlakenden, from Mopesden and Marsh Quarter, from as far away as Flatropers over in Sussex took respectful leave. Last of all Harman and Maggie climbed into their gig. Maggie had parted from her mother, it seemed to Rainger, with reluctance, but this again, he told himself, might be due to the occasion. Just as Harman shook the reins, she leaned down over the wheel, and said to Frank almost eagerly—

" You'll come to Mockbeggar ? "

For an instant his eyes met hers, and he saw in them a demand, a childish earnestness.

" Yes, I'll come soon," he answered, his voice made almost casual by his dread of a lapse.

She sat up again, and the next minute they were driving off, their stiff black figures blocked against the glass-green twilight sky.

§ 4

The next morning Frank rose at six—he had gone back to his early habits, ignoring London days when he lay abed till eight. He stood for a moment in the cold blue darkness of his room, pausing before he scattered it with candle-light. The window was uncurtained, and the unsetting stars of the Pole winked frostily above the oast-houses. There was a wonderful freshness in the air, at once invigorating, and motionless as a pond. The gladness of being in the country burst upon him afresh each morning. He remembered the stale air of Bury Street, the stagnant soup of fog which daylight only grimed, the torn ribbons of sky one saw from the street, with the stars smeared out by the gas-glare below, the smell of soot and mire, the roar of jumbled sound. . . .

How had he ever lived there?—how could he ever go back there, now that the few things which had made his life there possible were gone? He had quite lost his craving for gaiety and joy and youthful racket. It was hard to say why, because he had never really satisfied it—one could scarcely apply such volatile terms to the dull babble of Leigh's wine parties or the emasculate twitter of Rita's " salon." His affair with Rita was the only touch of real brightness in his London life, and he had paid dear for it. His literary ambitions, for the present at any rate, were dead. He seemed to have shed a large part of his life in London, and yet it was a life which was not so much his own as a growth upon it. He had lost it all, and yet he saw how complete he stood.

By the time he was dressed, the sky had paled a little, and detail was creeping into the yard and the fields beyond. He went downstairs, and found Tom Coalbran warming himself at the kitchen fire in preparation for his morning round.

" Marnun', Frank."

" Morning, Tom."

These two had always liked each other. At adolescence

the four-armed, double-headed phenomenon known as Tom-and-Dave had reproduced itself by fission, and became two separate entities. Up till then Frank had never thought of the brothers apart, or liked one more than the other, but then he saw that Tom was kinder, cleaner, stronger and more gentle than Dave; and Tom, next to Maggie, had been his friend. Now they seemed to have tumbled back into their friendship after a year's complete cleavage. Tom suggested that Frank should come with him round the farm.

They went out, their breath smoky on the ice-cold air, Tom's lantern an orange splash on the blue dusk.

"We've a dunnamany more bëastes since you wur a-gone, Frank. I've had three stalls built on the cowshed, and pore fäather and I wur a-talking of a new haggard up by the stacks only the night afore he wur took bad in his böans."

"Any new hands?"

"I've a boy up from Corkwood to help me wud the horses, but stout men are scarce in these parts, and now pore fäather's a-gone . . . I wur thinking in my head, Frank—how wud you lik to stay on here and give us a hand wud the old pläace, 'stead of going back to Lunnon?"

Frank did not answer for a minute, and Tom continued—

"You'd be one of ourselves, like. You know our ways, and you've always bin sort of a brother to me and Dave. Of course I know as you're gentry, but you've bin bred hereabouts, and you're fond of the old pläace and the bëastes. I reckon you'd be valiant. But maybe you'd sooner be in Lunnon writing bookses."

"Not I!" said Frank.

"Then think in your head of wot I'm saying. I've talked of it to Dave and mother, and they're willing. We'd all work together, share and share alike. And we'd be just-about glad of a scholard wot cud read and write fur us and cast accounts."

"I'll think it over—but I can't make up my mind just yet. There are many things to consider."

As a matter of fact there was only one—Maggie. If he came to the conclusion that he was strong enough to live in her neighbourhood, to meet her often, to treat her as a sister, then he need not bother about much else. He had hopelessly failed as a man of letters, and his position as a yeoman farmer, even with only a third share in a farm, would be infinitely better than as a moping clerk. Besides, he had a certain contempt of all mental labour which was not creative. He would far rather work with his hands, with his big, strong body, which would not be big and strong much longer if he shut it up in stuffy rooms or cramped it over a desk. He now definitely hated the thought of going back to London, and the resolve to return with which he had left town now seemed stupid and unnatural.

The cold, pond-like atmosphere seemed to stir with the approach of dawn. The fields, the overflow on the marshes, the hills of Kent and the woods of Sussex, all showed through the thick green twilight. In the east beyond Appledore a long split of yellow had torn the edge of the sky. Frank watched the winter daylight creep among the barns—heavy blue shadows glided and scattered, the stalled animals stamped and lowed, the orange square of the kitchen window grew thick and lustreless in the surrounding light. Not as it came to London had the morning come to Moon's Green.

§ 5

Two days later Frank fulfilled his promise and went over to Mockbeggar. He knew that at all costs his relations with Maggie must be plain and natural, and it would not be natural for him to stay away. So he set out on an earth-sweet February afternoon. The air was still quiet as a pool, and the soft, misty sunshine was scented with loam and sap. The hedges were sprigged with the long catkins of the hazel, the squab, furry catkins of the willow, and sticky, damp horse-chestnut buds.

Mockbeggar Farm was on the road from Boldshaves to Barrows Land. It had long ago been known as Topkiln Farm, but having stood empty for some years, its nearness to the lane and its imposing gables had given it notoriety as a mock-beggar, and the name had clung to it ever since. It was an old house, built, unlike most in the Isle of Oxney, of stone, no longer tinted austerely, but soothed by time into the greyish, glaucous yellow of a honeycomb. Above it was a towering roof of Horsham slate, thickly cropped with moss and lichen and waving grass.

Maggie opened the front door. She wore a sacking apron, and her sleeves were rolled up.

"Good-day, Frank. I'm unaccountable glad to see you."

Her lips parted over her big teeth, and her kind grin at once welcomed him and teased him with memories.

He followed her into the house, and into the huge dungeon-like kitchen, where she was baking. The table was smeary with flour, and there were goblets of dough on a board, while from the oven came the appetising smell of baking bread. Frank apologised for having called on baking day.

"That's naun to me," said Maggie, "and I lik to have a body sitting by and talking whiles I work. 'Tis middling dreary in the house at times."

"Is your husband much away?"

"He's mostly in the yard or in the fields, and to-day he's over at Appledore market. Can you stay till supper, Frank?—he'll be back then, surelye."

Frank did not want to stay so long, but he saw the necessity of meeting Harman, and there was also in his heart a traitorous delight at finding himself here with Maggie in the big vault-like kitchen, while the firelight shadows shuttled round them and her baking made the place warm and sweet-scented.

Maggie seemed quite happy and unembarrassed, and at the same time he noticed a change in her. She had not been long enough married to lose those little self-important

airs a young matron gives herself, and yet there was nothing about her of a bride's shy rapture. She pulled a chair up to the fire for Frank, and invited him to smoke, while she went on thumping the dough.

For some time they talked of unimportant things. She was more confident than he—after all, she had more to be proud of, even though she might, or might not, have married Harman against her first inclination ; she must be proud of her big kitchen and stalwart farmhouse, and her position as the wife of the most important farmer in the Isle of Oxney. She at all events had failed in nothing except love, if she had failed in that.

After a while their talk grew less cautious and general. To his delight he found the conversation ebbing back into their childhood, drifting round their games and adventures, which Maggie had not quite forgotten, though he was the chief remembrancer. These memories did not pain him now that he shared them with her, as they had done when he had pondered them alone. They seemed to step back hand in hand into the dim, enchanted country where they had once been king and queen together. . . .

" Do you remember the dancing bear wot came to Wittersham ten summers ago ? I remember that plainer than anything wotsumdever."

" Plainer than Cranbrook Circus ? " asked Frank, from whose mind the visit of the dancing bear had practically faded.

" Oh yes, I reckon. I shall never forget that bear. He had a liddle red cap on his head, all on one side, and he went galumph, galumph on his gurt brown feet, wot had claws lik a dog's, and his hands hung down in front over his belly—oh, I laffed and laffed——" and Maggie's laughter rang up among the beams.

Frank was a little hurt at her remembering a dancing bear, forgotten by him, better than Cranbrook Circus, which he had always looked on as his boyhood's best adventure. He changed the subject.

" Do you remember how you used to say there were

ghosts in Mopesden Wood?—ghosts like toadstools, with horns on their heads——"

Maggie dropped her rolling-pin.

"Döan't talk to me of ghosteses, Frank—it äun't safe; this place is full of 'em."

"Ghosts—here?"

He had to tumble back into the ways of her superstition.

"Yes, Frank—they wur here the very first night. I haven't seen them, but I've heard them, and I'm justabout scared." . . .

She came round the table towards him, and he saw that the happy look had gone from her face. In its place was something very like the look he had seen when she gave him her invitation from the gig; there was eagerness in it, and fear. He half rose in his seat.

"Maggie." . . .

There was the clump of heavy boots in the passage, and the sound of a whip being thrown down.

"That's Harman come back," said Maggie.

She stood still, and he sat down. Her voice was calm again, but the look of dread and eagerness was still in her eyes.

§ 6

Supper was rather an ordeal. Frank noticed that Maggie seemed constrained in the presence of her husband, who did not himself do much to promote ease and conversation. He had begun badly by rebuking her, in the presence of her visitor, for not having long ago finished her baking and laid the table. The rebuke was given entirely without anger and was no doubt well deserved, though the hour was still early; but Maggie was naturally ruffled and pained by its public delivery, and though Frank took the blame on himself, he was also embarrassed, and extremely angry with Harman.

The farmer of Mockbeggar was a tall, severe-looking man of forty-five, who had oddly about him the air of a minister in spite of his drab coat and riding-breeches. He

was not unhandsome, indeed there was something positively fine in his thick black hair, brushed unusually back from his forehead, and his bright dark eye. He had the eyes of a passionate man, the mouth of an ascetic. It was quite evident, in spite of the rebuke and his undemonstrative manner, that he adored Maggie. What her feelings were for him, Frank could not gauge so easily. He obviously was not physically objectionable to her, and she was obviously anxious to please him, but it was that same anxiety which to Frank seemed ominous—it was too eager, too restless, too propitiating. With a dart of insight he saw it as self-propitiating. Her duty and devotion to her husband were sops not so much to him as to herself.

After supper Harman went off to cast accounts in his corn-chamber, and Maggie prepared to wash up the dishes. She had, it appeared, a girl to help her, but that girl was at present visiting a sick parent at Marsh Quarter, leaving her single-handed. Frank, who had meant to go home, offered his services, which she accepted gratefully.

She filled a tub with hot water, in which she put the plates, handing them out to Frank, who dried them gingerly. Now and then he had helped her or Mrs. Coalbran wash up at Moon's Green, but by common consent they had stopped their reminiscences.

"This dish-washing must queer you unaccountable," said Maggie suddenly, "now you're used to writing bookses."

It was her first definite reference to his life in London, and somehow Frank had made up his mind that the subject would never be mentioned between them.

"My 'bookses' were a failure, Maggie," he said after a pause. "I shan't write any more."

"No more—but I thought as you wur going to be a valiant gurt book-writer."

"Not I! At first I'd my hopes and my ambitions, but I soon saw I'd nothing else—no talent, I mean. I could only do hack-work, and that not well."

"Lordy, then, I'm sorry. I reckon you're disappointed."

" Reckon I am "—he was slipping back into the old tongue.

" Will you be going back to Lunnon ? "

" I don't know."

" Wot of your getting married ? Dave töald us six month agone, as you wur lik to git married."

Frank's tongue felt thick and cold in his mouth. He could scarcely speak.

" I'm not going to be married. Dave made a mistake."

" He said it wur to a fine lady and all."

Frank shook his head. He could not utter a word. He was amazed, struck dumb by her attitude. All the afternoon and evening he had been thinking that he had only to talk of what they talked of now to tear off the skin of her naturalness and see the raw wounded flesh beneath ; and now all he saw was its healthy soundness, its firm and clean foundations. She was not pretending, she had never pretended. She was unaffectedly glad to have him with her, her old love and childhood's friend—he gave her not the faintest pang of disquiet or regret. Her delight in his presence was not the thorny union of sweetness and pain that formed his delight in hers.

" I'm sorry, Frank," continued Maggie, placidly scouring. " I thought as how you might have found a wife."

He longed to ask her whether, if she had not thought so, she would have married Harman, but managed to say instead—

" The lady Dave saw was only a friend—a literary friend. She's now married to some one else."

Maggie did not answer at once. She pondered. Frank knew that though she might believe what he said about the marriage she did not believe what he said about the friendship—ignorant and unsophisticated she might be, but not to the point of failing to realise the significance of Rita's installed presence in his rooms, if David had reported faithfully and in detail, which was the most likely way for him to report.

" Well," she said at last, " I'm sorry in a way, but in

a way I'm glad. I'm glad too you're stopping at Moon's Green. It'll mäake things a bit less lonesome fur me."

" Are you lonesome, Maggie ? "

" Unaccountable at whiles. Harman's out most of the day, and there's not a neighbour wudin half a mile. And, as I've bin saying, this pläace is full of ghosteses, tarble ghosteses. Harman mocks at me fur believing in them, but you're different, Frank, you know the tarble things we saw when we wur childer . . . you wöan't mock, you'll help me not to be so scared. I shudn't be so scared if I wurn't so lonesome."

Again that hunted, eager look was in her eyes, and it smote him all the more because he knew it had no connection with himself.

" I shan't be going back yet awhile, so I'll come over and see you again. But you mustn't let yourself be lonesome, Maggie. You've a husband, servants, and a big house. There should be plenty to do and plenty of folk to see."

" I dunno. It's different from Moon's Green—then there wur always mother and fäather around, and the boys. Howsumdever, I can't expect to have things now I'm a wife säum as when I wur a maid. After all I was a lucky girl to have Harman ask me twice." . . .

The conversation was growing dangerous, at least for Frank, with his teeth shut on his unasked question. All the dishes were now washed and dried, so he said that he must be getting home.

" Give my love to mother," said Maggie, " and ask her if she's forgot that recipe fur a bag-pudden as she promised to let me have—the one wud the spice in it. You might bring it over to-morrer——"

" I don't know that I can come to-morrow. I'm going with Tom to Robertsbridge."

He had formed the resolution as he spoke. Maggie's face fell.

" Oh, I'm tedious sorry. Well, come soon, anyways. And when you go through the yard to-night, you might

pop open the corn-chamber door, and tell Harman as how I'm unaccountable lonesome." . . .

§ 7

As he lay awake that night, Frank felt a little ashamed of his confidence in Maggie's love. It stank of conceit. Why should she go on loving him when he had so long neglected her, and a better man stood at her door? Her short bloom of passion was dead, killed naturally by his long absence and neglect. It was possible that if she had not heard of his affair with Rita she might never have married Harman, but on the other hand he now felt convinced that she had not married out of pique and reaction. For a time at least she had genuinely loved her husband—he could still see the dregs in the cup.

Of course he had to account for the fact that he had not been told of her wedding, and that Mr. Bellack had suspected her of being offended with him. But this was not difficult to explain. It was likely that she would be hurt by his inconstancy, even if she had soon found comfort in another's faith, and though now she evidently bore him no grudge, there had doubtless been a time when she thought very badly of him and would not have seen him on any account.

Now he saw that he was more than forgiven. She had been a little constrained at the funeral, but that had soon passed away. The claims of their childhood's comradeship had triumphed over a brief interval of passion and disillusion. She would have him be to her now what he had been to her before the days of their love. Out of her childhood Frank had come back, and she had seen in him not the dead lover but the dead playmate, and forgot and forgave the tears he had cost her for the sake of the games they had shared. . . .

It was on this footing that he stood, and the fact that his feelings were not the same as hers did not change his duty. As in Rita lay his debt to the past, so in Maggie

lay his debt to the future. He must atone, for he had injured her. Though she had loved Harman, probably loved him still, they were not suited to each other. He was too grim, too adult for her freshness. She was like a child, shut up in a house with only grown-up people, feeling oppressed by discipline, homesick for games and laughter. Doubtless in time the mood would pass—she herself would grow sedate and middle-aged like her husband, much more quickly than if she had stayed a maiden or married a younger man. But meantime he must help her battle through it. He was glad that things had so fallen out that he could still bring her help and comfort, though he could not be her helper or comforter by right.

He owed her his service, for though he knew that she did not love him, that she loved her husband, he also knew that he, not Harman, should have been her husband—he could have made her happy, for in spite of their different birth and ways they were of the same fibre and fitted each other as a fruit into its rind. If he had not shown himself unworthy she would still have loved him. Her uneasiness, her unrest, her loneliness, and childish fears in the big dark house of Mockbeggar lay at his door.

§ 8

Maggie's need of him was the weight which dropped the balance. He decided to accept the Coalbrans' offer and stay at Moon's Green. There were other reasons why he should not go back to Town, but they were all based on inclination—he loved the country and hated the thought of leaving it ; besides, in London he was a failure and could expect only the drabbest life, and to make matters worse he would have to live among the ruins of his ambition. In the case of Maggie, his inclination was all for leaving Kent. The continual rub and fret of her presence, only a mile away, had up to his visit to Mockbeggar been his one reason for going back to Town ; but now that he saw she

did not love him, merely needed him to brighten her loneliness and comfort her fears, such a reason no longer held good—it was reversed. He must stay, and help her with his brotherly strength and love. Of course there were dangers, but he told himself they were only for him. Her feelings both towards him and towards her husband would protect her, and scandal was not likely to be much at work over two who had lived as brother and sister from childhood.

The Coalbrans were of course delighted. Frank was touched by their warmth, and it was a fact that his twenty months in London and constant association with the beauclerkly tribe had only stimulated his liking for simple hearts and honest muscle. Perhaps it was reaction, but he found that he infinitely preferred Dave and Tom Coalbran, uncouth and inarticulate, to the smooth intellectualism of Irons and Leigh. He began to see his literary life as drearily aimless and emasculate What a lot they had talked! What a little they had done! Not one of that set had had a ghost of genius, except Rita, who was a woman and preferred love.

Frank found himself looking forward to the hardy, bookless life at Moon's Green. In his honour as a yeoman farmer he would forget his disgrace as a journalist. He would work till his back ached, till his girth grew, till he had lost his London pastiness. He would fill his mind with the good lore of the earth instead of the lore of books, and his experience should not be the hectic shift and dazzle of amorous adventure, but the sound experience of the earth's ways, of her sowing and gestation and bringing forth. In his enthusiasm he told himself that he would learn to be like her as those who lived on her were like her, hard and swarthy and cautious and niggard, learning to give to no one save herself—giving her his time and toil and his mind and his age, till at last, like stout Luke Coalbran, he gave her his bones to eat.

At first he could not tell whether Mr. Bellack was pleased or not at his decision.

" So, Frank, you've come back to your old love. The new one did not hold you long."

" She would have none of me, sir. I was a failure."

" Altogether ? "

" Altogether."

" Um." . . .

" I'm looking forward to being a farmer, sir."

" But would you have missed those two years in which you tried, and according to yourself failed, to be something different ? "

Frank hesitated. Then he said : " No."

Richard Leigh wrote rather indignantly from London :

" I can't see why you should throw up the sponge simply because you failed at the start. After all, though you may not be able to write, that's no reason why you should rush home and bury your brains in country mud. You would be better off even as a clerk than as a farmer, for you would be able to go on meeting intellectual people of your own class, which you aren't likely to do at Wittersham. You could easily get a clerkship in a publisher's office, which would mean constant association with literary men and the best thought of the day—who knows but in time you might take up writing again ? A few years in intellectual surroundings might do wonders for you. Whereas, if you go and hide yourself in Kent——"

Frank tore up Richard's letter with a grin of delight.

If ever he had wavered, he would have been confirmed by Maggie's joy at his decision.

" Oh, Frank, how justabout splendid ! I'm unaccountable glad you're not going off agäun to furrin parts. It'll be like old timeses having you at Moon's Green, not more'n a mile away. He can come and sit wud us of an evenun, can't he, Harman ? "

To his surprise Frank received from Harman quite a cordial invitation. The man was certainly not a bad fellow, though reserved and stiff, with ideas at war with his instincts.

§ 9

So Frank became a farmer again, and for good, he told himself. His shoddy, elegant London clothes were put away in one of the big chests in the attics, and once more he wore drab and corduroys and heavy boots, which sometimes looked as if they were made of earth, so thickly were they caked.

He rode to market, he drank at pubs, he went to bed at nine o'clock and rose at five. He grew stout and strong, so that he soon could take a hand at the plough himself, holding it down to the soggy furrows of the wealden clay, while the patient earth-coloured horses plodded and strained over the ribbed, brown hill, and the bare branches of the trees seemed to fly out like tatters against the clouds which the March wind hurried along. . . .

His face grew ruddy once more, the colour of the clay which dripped from his plough, his hair, dark and draggled with sweat, lost its fiery autumn lift against his brow, so with his soil-coloured face and hair and corduroys, he and his brown horses were hardly distinguishable from the brown hill on which they laboured. He wore the earth's livery, even to his skin.

At first he had formed plans for not quite neglecting his reading, and had borrowed books from Leigh and Mr. Bellack. But he was too tired of an evening to sit up over books, and soon he never thought of them, except, as he rolled between the sheets, sometimes to throw a deprecating glance at the shelf on which they stood. And in time he did not even do that, for, as they meant extra dusting for Mrs. Coalbran and Lot, the servant-girl, in a month or two he returned them to their lenders, locking up his own little store—*Esmond*, *Vanity Fair*, *Copperfield*, *Macaulay's Essays*, and Rita's novel *Mountain Ash*—in his box under the bed.

Moon's Green was a typical Kentish farm, typical of Sussex too. It consisted mostly of grass—fifty acres or so of Wet Level, as well as several meadows on the higher

ground; there was a little grain, chiefly oats, and about twenty acres of hops. There were also one or two large tangled fields which seemed to have no use at all, as nothing grew in them but rank grass and thistles. These were to be found on most farms of that unfertile neighbourhood, and no farmer ever made any effort to reclaim or cultivate them, though he occasionally thought of doing so.

The Coalbrans were not up-to-date in their methods. They used no machinery except the travelling thresher, which rumbled round from farm to farm in November, purring and humming as it chewed up the harvest into genuines, seconds, and seed. They were leisurely and not particularly thorough, they never fought with their land—if a particular crop would not grow well on a particular piece of ground, they gave up the struggle and planted something else.

They accepted the earth's decrees with a wonderful patience. Though always complaining about the weather, if a storm should overturn their plans, or a drought eat up their crops, they made no outcry beyond the ordinary grumble. On the whole they were prosperous, chiefly owing to their marsh flocks; their farm paid its way, which was counted success in the Isle of Oxney. They all worked hard, untiring and unmurmuring as animals.

§ 10

Frank had been a year at Moon's Green before his routine was broken by any special event which could not be accounted for by the calendar. Then a thunderbolt was dropped into the little hard-working party—dropped by one of themselves. Tom Coalbran suddenly announced that he was going for a soldier, to fight in the Crimea.

England had been at war with Russia a couple of weeks, but no one in the Isle of Oxney troubled much about that, except to discuss how far the stopping of Russian grain-supplies would affect the price of wheat. Tom's announcement, therefore, seemed preposterous. He had always

been famed for his love of a scrap, but this was indulging his tastes altogether too extravagantly.

"Wot d'you want to go fighting furriners for?" asked Mrs. Coalbran, stopping her dole of pease pudding, for Tom had dropped his thunderbolt at the supper-table.

"If there's a fight, reckon I'd lik to be in it."

"You can fight at Robertsbridge Fair," said David, "and win a fat purse, too. You'll git naun fur fighting the Russians."

"But I want to fight 'em," said Tom.

"And wot's to become of the farm when you're a-gone? We'll have to git an extra man, surelye."

"Wot of that? We äun't broke, and there'll be one less to feed."

"But he wöan't have your know, I reckon."

"Well, there's you and Frank to larn un. Frank's larned our ways now, and he's a sharp chap, and valiant. I tell you, he'll be a better man than myself, one o' these days. Besides, the war wöan't last till judgment. I'll come back."

"Wot'll you do if the Russians kill you?" asked Mrs. Coalbran.

"I'll do naun—I'll be dead, I reckon."

Mrs. Coalbran began to cry.

"Doan't you go worriting, mother. Them furriners äun't lik to kill me, and if they do, why I might get killed just as easy at höame—thrown off my horse, or caught in the thresher lik pore Pix of Ethnam."

"Maybe Dave ull git killed lik that while you're away," Mrs. Coalbran suggested cheerfully, "and then I shan't have no sons wotsumdever."

"It queers me," said David, "how you can be leaving a good house and a good fire to go spannelling about a hemmed silly furrin pläace lik Russia. You'll be cold and you'll be hungry, and maybe, as mother says, you'll be killed."

"I tell you I want to fight."

"But why shud you want to fight?"

" Because I lik fighting," said Tom, who was not good at explanations.

" Then why can't you fight at höame, wud your fists, lik a good yeoman ? Wot d'you want to go spannelling about furrin parts fur—fighting other folkses' quarrels, and all fur naun ? "

The argument, having got back to where it had originally started, was resumed with great vigour, and fought over again on practically the same lines. It was started once more at breakfast, but it was useless. Tom's mind was made up with the solidarity of simple minds. In spite of his absorption in his work, and his love of the dumb beasts he tended, he could not bear to think of the great fight that was going on without him. The mildest, gentlest-tempered of men, fighting was his joy, not only, so it now appeared, on the small scale of the boxing-ring, but in its widest international sense, typified by those armies camped round Sebastopol.

The day before he went, he walked over the farm with Frank, pointing out particular bits of work he hoped would be done in his absence, recommending particular animals to his friend's and his brother's care.

" Maybe I'll be back before Emmeline calves. Maybe I wöan't."

He suggested that Frank should buy a shire stallion at Ashford Fair for breeding purposes, that he should prepare Whitecreep meadow for grain-growing in case prices went up.

" Put rape-dust in the furrers wud the seed, my lad—and kip Maysie out at grass a month longer. She's still a bit too dentical fur wark, pore liddle lady."

The next day he was gone, and came back only once after taking the shilling—very awkward and self-conscious in his uniform, a huge unwieldy scarlet beetle, bumbling about the house and yard, obviously wishing he had never left them.

A month later he set out for the Crimea, and the darkness swallowed him up. He made no effort to communicate with his family, nor they the slightest to communicate with

him. Sometimes in the autumn and winter when Frank read aloud from the week-old newspaper of the hideous sufferings of the troops round Sebastopol, Dave, by the fireside, would take his pipe out of his mouth, and murmur: "Pore old Tom. I wonder how he's faring," and Mrs. Coalbran would sigh: "Pore lad, I reckon he wishes himself at höam agäun." But they made no effort to find out whether he was alive or dead.

Their silence taught Frank how little could be based on the silences of inarticulate people. Maggie, in spite of her scraped acquaintance with penmanship, was inarticulate enough, yet for months he had blamed and mistrusted her because she had not written to him as often as he, with his habit and fluency, had written to her. It never occurred to the Coalbrans to write to Tom, though their hearts were stumbling blindly after him through all the horrors of that winter campaign, and though they knew that Frank would willingly step into the breach of their illiteracy and write for them. No wonder, then, that Maggie had not written often, that she had fumbled and stuttered with her pen, that she had trusted to his love and understanding to fill the gaps in her poor letters. The burden of his reproach grew.

§ 11

Maggie was the stormy point in his otherwise fair and tranquil life. But she also was his life, so her tempests and shadows were cast over all his fine weather. Outwardly he had been able to maintain the attitude he had schemed, and at first he had found a certain relief in her sisterly manner, in the relapse of her brief passion into friendship. But as the months went by her friendliness rubbed him sore. He remembered the short, shy weeks in which he had courted her; he could feel her cool lips under his kisses, smell the dainty-sweetness of her skin, thrill with the quiver of her response as her body leaned against his own. And now she had given all that, all that wonderful part of her which had once so briefly been his, to another.

She doled him the plain food of friendship, she hid her dainties, bestowing them elsewhere.

He did not undervalue her friendship, or the fact that in some ways he was more to her than Harman. Perhaps if he had never seen her otherwise he would have been content with her simple reliance and good-will; but all the time he saw her so kind, he was haunted by the knowledge of how much more she could be, and was—to another man. He had experience to help imagination, and it hurt him to interpret the look which sometimes came into her eyes when her husband was near. The calm and stolid crust of her nature made it all the more painful for him to have to picture and remember its softer foundations.

He went to Mockbeggar generally twice or thrice a week, either for supper or for just an evening's chat. Often he did not see Maggie alone, but when he did she told him what a comfort his visits were to her.

"You're just lik a brother to me, Frank. You mäake me disremember all the ghosteses."

Sometimes he wondered if she referred to the ghosts with which she firmly believed the upper part of the house to be full, or if she was thinking of the ghosts of the past which had been laid by his faithful service. He wondered —but he could not ask. He often thought it would be easier for him if he could have one good talk with her about the events leading to her marriage. But he shrank from disturbing her dead. For on one thing he was resolved, and that was never again to sacrifice her on the altar of his daring.

The months went by. October and November draggled the fields and hedges, till even inside the houses men could smell the damp earth and rotting leaf-mould. Then December and January came and gripped the Isle of Oxney in a fist of iron, so that the earth was stiff and savourless, and the trees stood still and wiry against a leaden sky. In February sap began to stir in the dry twigs of the hedges, and sticky buds to swell and burst in March. Spring was coming back with the old promise, demanding the old

sacrifice. But Frank no longer felt the thrill of her promise, and had not yet consummated his sacrifice to a bygone spring.

Moon's Green and Mockbeggar made their winter and spring sowings, tided through their lambing, planted their hops, and Frank still went to and fro between them, working out his atonement by filling a gap in the life of the woman to whom he might have been all things.

In the autumn that gap grew even smaller, for Maggie gave birth to a little girl. It was then that Frank felt in its fullness the misery of his position. The birth of Maggie's baby was the climax of that physical jealousy which had made his attitude so difficult to sustain. For some time he made no effort to sustain it. He did not call at Mockbeggar while Maggie was lying in. When he was not at work at Moon's Green, he was tramping the lanes and fields in a vain effort to ease the acute agony into which the dull ache of his love had suddenly exalted itself.

He could not bear to think of Maggie and her baby, he even felt that he could not bear to see the child or the mother again. It seemed as if till that birth he and Maggie had at least touched hands, but now they were torn apart —he could not be to her even what he had been during the past two years. She had her child, and the father of her child. Oh God ! He had not thought that even his aching love held yet this further secret of endurance.

Sometimes he told himself that he would go back to London, or to some other part of the country, but all the while he knew that he would not go, because she had still need of him ; even though it might be less need. He had exalted intervals in which he felt that what she gave him was more than what she gave Harman, and that it was only because lovers are babes, and desire the milk of love, that he could not digest this strong meat of friendship which she offered. Physically she relied on Harman, mentally she relied on Frank, and he told himself that the mental part of even a little country animal like Maggie is the best and most desirable. But soon he would slip from

his mood of exaltation, back into his human struggling and craving.

Then at last he began to grow calm ; as his jealousy wore itself out, the despair and the exaltation died together into a monotone of acceptance. The pain wore down into its usual dull ache. And one day he found himself at Mockbeggar, holding Maggie's baby in his arms.

§ 12

In September '55 the Malakoff was stormed and Sebastopol fell, and the next year Tom came home, stouter and stronger and more talkative than when he had gone away. He had faced hardships of such sheer physical horror as to break his talk with gaps and his thoughts with strangled memories ; but on the whole, he said, it was a good fight, and he was glad to have been in it—though he was also glad to be back at Moon's Green, with his pipe in his mouth and his feet in the fender, and the Redan and the Malakoff and Generals January and February cashiered into reminiscences and bad dreams.

" Last Christmas twelvemonth I wore boots made of brown päaper, and they wur full of lice."

Frank was delighted to have Tom back again. He was fond of Mrs. Coalbran and David, but the former had not often an idea in her head or a sensible word on her tongue, and the latter carried the rural caution and close-fistedness to an extreme ; he was also lecherous, in the slow, dull way one is lecherous in the country.

Tom was much improved by his adventure. He was more enlightened, more tolerant, more a man of the world. He had been among " furriners " and learned that they were also human beings, a fact one might have doubted when listening to a Wittersham discussion on foreign politics. He was interested in his country as a whole, not merely Kent and Sussex, which formed the limit of most local horizons, if indeed they spread beyond the Isle of Oxney. When the week-old newspaper came thumbed and

frayed to Moon's Green, he would beg Frank to read him the whole of it, not merely the agricultural column. He would sometimes even try to spell it out himself, for a fellow soldier had filled some of the long, hard-frozen, Crimean evenings by teaching him to read.

" He wur gentry, Frank—crossed in love and took the shilling. Lordy ! That's what I'd do if I wur crossed in love—go fur a soldier. That mäakes you disremember everything save your own self. When I fust went out I wur fur ever thinking of you all at häome, but when I'd bin out a month all I wur thinking of wur just wot I'd git to eat, and how I cud git warm."

" Did you ever think of killing Cossacks ? "

" Now and agäun. But I tell you when you're killing a man you doan't think of it—it's not like bruising, when you're naun but two fisteses wud a whole man before 'em. I once thought of it when I wur killing a Cossack—I'd got him down, wud my bayonet in his liver, and just as I thrust I thought—' Maybe he's got a wife and children or an old father and mother,' all in a second, like. Then I thought ' Be hemmed to you, you lousy, dentical, soft-hearted, womanish fool '—and I gave that bayonet a twist, and I finished that Cossack, and I took his boots into the bargain, since my own wur made of päaper."

§ 13

During the next seven years, Maggie had three more children, two girls and a boy. But they brought Frank no torment like the first. It seemed as if the fires of his physical jealousy had burned themselves out, leaving his heart calcined, and unable to respond to further stimuli. At all events his feeling towards Maggie during those years were much gentler and calmer. His love did not fade, though it lost some of its flamboyance. It was no longer a fiery mysterious thing that walked beside him, but part of his human nature—as humdrum and as commonplace as breathing and sleeping and eating.

Perhaps one reason for his meeker acceptance of these other little ones was the fact that they did not seem to absorb Maggie like the first. They did nothing more to crowd him out of that tiny gap which he filled in her life. The first child had been her joy and miracle, it had revived all her dormant feelings for Harman, love and passion for him had awakened, singing. In those days Frank might, if he had wished, have gone back to London without causing her much pain.

But he had not wished, for though she might be able to live without him he was quite unable to live without her. He was reaping the first consequences of his decision to stay at Moon's Green—he was growing utterly dependent on his glimpses of her, on her mile-off dwelling. Since he could not be her lover, he at least might be her guest ; if he could not have the husband's bread he at least might eat the crumbs which fell from the husband's table. So he did not stop his visits to Mockbeggar, though he could no longer flatter his uprightness that they were all for her sake, though he often spent them sitting quiet and sullen by the hearth while she danced her baby on her knee, and talked to her baby's father, and perhaps longed to be alone with him. . . .

After a time her happiness and wonder passed, and she began once more to feel the jar and fret of her life with Harman. Her second child drew them together again, but not for long. Her third child gave her no thrill, and her fourth was unwanted. She loved them, and cared for them with all the tenderness of her strong, animal instincts, even the last, the thought of whose coming had made her mope and weep. But they gave her no rapture or astonishment, they were no miracles wrought by love, merely the natural consequences of cohabitation.

" Children do justabout spannel up a house," she said to Frank ; " Harman döan't see it, fur I'm careful as they döan't git in his way. He never sees but wot's under his nose, surelye."

Maggie was altered physically and mentally by her

nine years of marriage and childbearing. She looked much older, for her figure was full and heavy, and her face weather-beaten. Also the rather contrary effect of living with a stern and dominating man had been to make her extremely self-willed. In the old days at Moon's Green, when she had done pretty well as she liked, this characteristic had scarcely been noticeable, but Harman's sustained attitude of censure and opposition had made it flourish. Instead of being subdued by his repressions she was irritated, and had occasional fits of defiance, in which he was sometimes maddened and would threaten to take a strap to her. Harman was not a quarrelsome man, but he could not understand a self-willed woman. He threw his will against hers in noisy clashing, he bore it down in grumblings and clatter.

§ 14

Meanwhile, his life at Moon's Green had made Frank completely a farmer. He was as much a farmer as Harman of Mockbeggar, or Pix of Ethnam, or Board of Old Turk, or Cooper of Kitchenhour. One would not think that for years of his youth he had planned a literary career, and for twenty foggy, jangling months struggled to make it. His London life had entirely slipped away—the friends of it were forgotten. Even Rita Simons was merely a vivid occasional flash across his mind, as one may remember a southern garden one has visited long ago and seldom thought of since. He hardly ever thought of her, or wondered whether she had found what she sought in marriage; the delights with which she had once thrilled him were dead, even to memory—save as a man remembers a flamboyant, rather foolish dream.

For some time he continued to hear at intervals from Richard Leigh, but gradually the letters became fewer and more crowded with unappreciable allusions. The old names dropped out, and their place was taken by new names without savour. A visit which Richard paid to

Wittersham Parsonage was a complete failure—he found Frank uncouth, and Frank found him weedy and emasculate. Soon afterwards he married a daughter of his cousin Pauncefort's, and settled down to live at Ealing. His letters ceased.

Frank found even his friendship with Mr. Bellack melting in the heats of agricultural concentration. His old tutor's place was being taken by Tom Coalbran. During the first year or two after his return, he had spent a good deal of his spare time at the Rectory. Mr. Bellack liked to hear about the Puseyite churches— St. George's-in-the-East, St. Paul's, Knightsbridge, and St. Barnabas, Pimlico—and he showed Frank some half-finished Tracts he had written as a sort of appendix to *Tracts for the Times*. But Frank had never been interested in the Puseyites, and was not interested in them now. Also the Parson's odd remoteness and cynicism troubled him as he grew daily more rough, more simple, and more concrete. He found Tom, with his talk of fields and animals, a far more congenial comrade. He wanted to forget religious storms—for the emotions which had shaken him in the incense-cloudy darkness of the Tractarian churches had passed as completely as those which had thrilled him at Rita's touch or look ; he saw them now as part of the one same madness, which belonged to a dead spring.

He read now and then, especially as Tom wanted to go on with the education begun in the Crimea, but few modern books came to Moon's Green. The stars of the late 'fifties twinkled and died unnoticed by Frank, as he helped Tom through the *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Robinson Crusoe*, or up and down the blotchy columns of the *Kentish News*. Sometimes of an evening he would turn a few pages of *Copperfield* or *Vanity Fair*, but in a quarter of an hour he was always like Dave and Tom—snoring in his armchair, while the firelight glowed on his extended legs, and Mrs. Coalbran moved about softly in the room behind him, anxious not to disturb her worn-out men.

His days were full of the farm's rites—sowing and

reaping, ploughing and harvesting, buying land, reclaiming land, manuring land, grubbing up land. He balanced accounts, checked sales, and entered purchases. He sampled foods and insect-killers, inspected milk, superintended threshings, hired shearers, harvest-workers and hop-pickers. He visited markets, examined stock, bought new implements and new beasts, engaged and dismissed hirelings. There was never a day or an hour which was not crowded and humming with business.

Moreover, as befitted his dignity as a yeoman farmer, he took his share in local politics. He became a Freemason, and attended the meetings of his Lodge at the Woolpack in Tenterden. He went on to the Rural Council, and at last even managed to squeeze into the Election Roll. The Coalbrans, like most yeomen, were Tories, and every few years the farmers of South-east Kent would fight the smug Tenterden tradesmen at the hustings, and break their heads on their Free Breakfast Table. Frank perhaps knew little more about politics than Tom or David, but the Moon's Green farmers always voted as one man, " to kip the prices up."

Sometimes he nearly forgot he was not a Coalbran, the brother of Tom and Dave, so brotherly did they rub on together, so alike were their thoughts, even, it seemed, their looks. Frank had grown immensely strong and stout. His skin was brown as his ploughed fields, and his muscles as hard as his plough. The earth was ingrained in the very cracks of his skin, and perhaps one day it would work its way through to his heart, and make it sturdy, simple, slow, ungracious. Then he could have the earth's peace and care no more for the joys and griefs of love than the earth cares for the spirit of man which goeth upwards. . . .

§ 15

Early in the year 'sixty, Dave Coalbran married. He married a girl from Becket's House, by Appledore—a shrew-looking, red-haired girl with the whitest skin. The

family circle at Moon's Green was not broken. Local custom did not empty a house of brothers when introducing a wife, and Frank and Tom stayed on, as did also Mrs. Coalbran, when Dave's Eliza came with her inheritance of walnut furniture and three hundred pounds. The walnut furniture was crowded into rooms already sturdily full of oak, the three hundred pounds bought a new wagon, a horse, three heifers, and a score of blackfaced sheep, and Dave's Eliza tore about the house in clods, slopping the brick floors with water, and scrubbing table-tops with strong-smelling soap.

Her shrewishness was entirely vented on the furniture. She was for ever scrubbing, and scraping, and slopping, and brushing. The kitchen smelled eternally of soap-suds, and the boarding of the stairs and passages was perpetually damp. It took her about a fortnight to perform the operation which she undertook every month and called "gitting the house straight." The house remained "straight" till the damp boards had begun to dry, and the smell of soap to fade, then she would start "gitting straight" again.

The men grumbled occasionally, but made no great outcry, for, apart from her domestic savagery, she was a delightful woman, sharp, good-humoured, and with an odd sort of feminine charm lacking in the greater part of farmer's wives. She never squabbled with her mother-in-law, and knew, besides, how to make the most succulent puddings and pies.

Dave was her fool and servant, and she never became the mere wageless cook which most women of her class become after the first ardours of the honeymoon. Though sometimes unfaithful to her, he always loved and admired her, no doubt for the reason that he was always a little afraid of her. He never quite understood her, and it was his nature to be afraid of what he could not understand. Hence her freedom.

Dave called her a "wunnerful woman," and continually advised Tom and Frank to follow his happy example, and

take wives unto themselves. Tom was by his own confession a " tar'ble coward wud the wenches," and hardly dared so much as speak to one, still less make love. A woman at Mopesden Farm had once embraced him when he came to see her husband about a load of mangold-wurzels, and he had never quite recovered from the shock. He was a big, good-looking fellow, and more than one girl would have had him if he had asked her, but as he told Frank " he'd as soon fäace all the Russian guns on the Malakoff."

As for Frank, David had often tried to plumb the mystery of the lady in the yellow dress whom he had found so unexpectedly in Bury Street, but on being gruffly told that she had married some one else, he stopped all public archness, though sometimes he would suggest to Frank " as one man to another " that he should find a substitute.

" Seemingly you haven't vrothered about the wenches since. I've scarce seen you spik to a woman säave Maggie."

The Coalbrans were grateful to Frank for his kindness to Maggie. He spared them a lot of trouble by going so often to see her. Mrs. Coalbran was growing old, and did not care to walk over to Mockbeggar more than once a week, and Tom and David were too busy to call except when they wanted to see Harman in the way of business.

He had now learned to accept his love. He ceased to try and explain it, and no longer struggled to subdue it. He saw Maggie now as part of the soil which had filled his childhood with dreams and his youth with longings, which had called him back from subtler preoccupations, and forged unbreakable chains for his binding. He could not cease to love her any more than he could cease to love the fields of the Isle of Oxney ; if he left her, she would call him back, as the Isle of Oxney would call him back—from the ends of the earth.

He had tried to leave her. He had tried to forget her again as he had once half forgotten her long ago—in another love. A woman had burden across his life and

out again, like a falling star—a publican's daughter at Rolvenden, white-faced, red-lipped, heavy-eyed. But she had not been able to make him forget Maggie, he had loved her only for a week, and his love had been dark and tawdry, full of smoke and pain. His passion grew low to its root—" I suffer," and he saw that it is right that the same word should express both the ecstasy of the lover and the agony of the god. He suffered. His brief love gashed and seared him, and in the end he crept back to Maggie, wounded, as a wounded beast creeps into a hole in the earth.

He saw her with all her faults, as he saw the coldness and cruelty to the earth, but he loved her none the less, indeed he loved her for them—little Maggie who had always been so cautious and so obstinate like the soil he tilled, and yet could flower so sweetly, hold out such promises, and fulfil them so unexpectedly.

Towards the end of the year he noticed a change in her. She became silent and depressed—sometimes he felt as if she did not want him any more. The soggy draggle of November had begun, the colour was gone from the woods, and the Isle of Oxney faded into drabs and greys. The year dipped towards the water flood.

In a life lived according to the seasons, guided by the wind's quarter, dependent on sun and rain, changed by every storm, it seems natural that the decline of each year should bring a decline of vitality and hope. Each November that trailed fogs up the Rother and the Reading Sewer, blanketing the Isle of Oxney into a damp sodden pack of mist and mud, had also trailed its drabness into Frank's heart, making him wonder why he lived, why he worked, why he loved, making him ask if it was for this that he had become as a god, knowing good and evil. This year was the darkest and dreariest since his return. He was well past thirty now, good and evil were growing monotonous, brown and puddled like the soil. His love was no longer a flame or his suffering an adventure. His suffering was like the thick November rain, and his love like the earth which is so heavy, drear and hopeless in November.

§ 16

At last came the winter solstice, when the sun turns northward from the butt of Capricorn. First of all spring crept into the evening sky, then into the sunrise. All the while the earth gave no sign, but lay rigid and frost-bound, badged with sterility. Then at last the dayspring from the sky came down to her, she seemed to respond to the pale shimmering green of the twilight, the early white dawns, and at noon a soft fertile haze would smudge the young leaves and grass. The thick November rain drizzling on the brown November sods had called the spring out of their barrenness. The willows budded by the watercourses, young lambs bleated in the pastures, and at last the primroses filled with their pale bloom the hollows of Wassall.

" There was a little hollow full of primroses at Wassall, and the scent of it drove me mad." Frank had never forgotten his father's words. Each year when the primroses came out he remembered them; each time he remembered he swore afresh that, come what might, he would stay and face things out, he would not run away like his father. He felt that now, if he had wanted, he might have run away from Moon's Green, for Maggie did not seem to cling to his presence as she used. Perhaps she would not grieve very much if he told her he was leaving the Isle of Oxney. None the less, he stayed; for when sometimes he took fright at his own realisation that he could not live without her, he stiffened himself with the thought of that dawn of ten years ago, and life's revenge on life's runaway.

Now Dave was married, Frank and Tom were all the closer friends. They were like brothers, but though Frank was the younger he always took the elder's place. Tom deferred to him, even in farm matters, and eagerly fed on any educational crumbs he had to strow. Not that Tom cared for " bookses." All he wanted to do was to be able to read and write, so that he might have some knowledge

of those things which happened outside the Isle of Oxney. He was terribly slow, and Frank despaired of his ever being able to spell out words of more than two syllables. But Tom was immensely proud of himself, and at all events his enlarged horizon made him a better comrade.

That spring saw the beginning of the American Civil War. No one at Moon's Green was interested in the smallest degree, except Frank and Tom. Tom admired the soldierly spirit of the Confederates, his sympathies being further engrossed by their agricultural stake. He and Frank pored together over the Foreign News column in the Kentish paper, and Tom more than once openly expressed a wish that England might by some means be involved in the struggle. Even more than farming he loved fighting, and he was already beginning to tire of his placid days—the soldier in him had scarcely been satisfied by the Crimean campaign. He was growing restless, he found Dave " slow," and was angry because he refused to take the slightest interest in the American struggle.

" It's naun to do wud me," said Dave, " wot's it to me if furriners fight ? At least only half the Crimea wur furriners. This is all furriners and none o' my business."

" But if no more cotton comes to England from the States ? "

" That's not my affair, nuther. I've naun to do wud cotton. I doan't grow it and I doan't spin it."

" But the föalkses in Manchester——"

" Manchester ! Wot's Manchester ! I live in the Isle of Oxney. I döan't care wot happens in Manchester and such-like furrin parts. Be hemmed to all furriners, I say."

§ 17

One evening in September, when Frank was thinking of going to the London Trader for his gig, after a day in Rye Cattle Market, Tom Coalbran said—

" Cöame and have a look at summat fust."

It was still early, and though Frank wanted to call at

Mockbeggar on his way home, the journey was not likely to take more than a couple of hours behind Tom's smart mare, so he turned down Wish Ward towards the Rother.

The roofs of the ship-builders' stores were blocked against a fiery west, while strange greens and lemons daubed the edge of the glow. The waters of the Rother were dark, spotted with moving flecks and points of light. At the bend of the river, where it widens by Gasson's Wharf, was the black cobweb of a ship, a-building among scaffold poles. Tom took Frank over the mud flap of the Rother's ebb-tide bed, so that they came close to the ship, and could see her hull bulging over them as they stood.

" Wot d'you think they're building her fur ? " he asked almost in a whisper.

" I dunno," said Frank.

" To sail across to America."

" The United States ? "

" Yes—she's going to run the blockade, and täake out a cargo to North Carolina."

" Who's building her ? "

" Young Gasson. But her cargo äun't from these parts."

They stood for a few moments staring up at the ship with their landsmen's eyes, while the hammers of the builders fell with a sharp clacking rhythm on the still air. Then Tom said huskily—

" Old chap, I wish I wur sailing in her."

" Do you want to go to America, Tom ? "

" Reckon I do. I want to fight. I can't a-bear to think of that gurt fight going on over there wudout me."

" But it's none of our concern. England won't be dragged into it."

" She wöan't, I reckon. But I'm not so sure about Tom Coalbran."

" What about the farm ? We'd get on badly without you."

" You got on well enough wudout me when I wur fighting the Russians."

" I can't think what makes you so fond of fighting. You're an unaccountably mild-mannered man."

Tom grinned slowly : " Reckon I am—not got the pluck to stand up to a wench. And yit I licked Northiam's Curley Bruiser at Boarzell Fair only a year ago ; and I've stuck my bayonet into more Cossacks than you've stuck you pitchfork into haycocks. Reckon I'm more of a fighter than a farmer, fur though I'm unaccountable fond of the öald farm, I'd leave it any day I'd the chance of a purty fight—lik the one out West."

" But do you care tuppence about the American quarrel ? "

" Not I !—can't see the roundabout of it, nuther. But if I cud fight I'd fight for the South, since I reckon the best men are there—the best soldiers and the best farmers. Lordy ! when you read me of that battle of Bull Run, the blood wur justabout singing in my head, to think of General Jackson coming up lik that so valiant. I'd lik to sarve under General Jackson—or maybe General Beauregard. I feel fur them Southern States, wud all their gurt farms and plantations, even though they do wark niggers on 'em."

" So you'd fight for slavery."

" I'd fight fur slavery if the best men wur fighting fur it, just as I'd fight agäunst it if they wur agäunst it. I'm fur the best men—that's the best farmers and the best soldiers. I döan't care about naun else. Still I reckon there's not much sense in spikking—I äun't in America, I'm here in the Isle of Oxney, and not lik to leave it, nuther."

" Well, shall we go and fetch the trap ? It's getting late."

Frank felt a strange stirring pain as he looked up at the skeleton ship, with the sunset flaming through its bones. The wind came from the sunset, and whistled in the bars and scaffolding, and its low, throbbing note was to him the song of the West, calling him out to the sunset—blood-stained and aflame, calling him to leave a work and a love

which had both become habits, and reach out towards something less beautiful, perhaps, but less bound. He had often thought of going out to the New World, but it was not till now that, through the bars of the skeleton ship, he had heard its call—now when the New World was torn up with strife, and could promise him not bread but blood, not a plough but a sword. . . . He caught Tom's arm, and turned away.

" Let's go and fetch the trap."

They were soon spanking over the Landgate Road, the lights of Playden and Rye Foreign twinkling down on them from the hill.

The scent of hops drifted on the night air from the hop gardens of Brede and Udimore, and in the twilight, rusted by a harvest moon, they could see the ghostly yellow of the unreaped cornfields round Flatropers Farm. Down on the marsh below the hill, the Rother sheeted itself into a huge pool, as its stream, lustreless as a cloth, mingled with the channel of the Fivewatering.

" It's a good night," said Tom, " to-morrow we'll be able to pick the Notch Field fuggles."

" What do you think of the goldings this year ? "

" Tedious—tedious. Not nearly so good as the fuggles. If Dave and you are willing, we'll plant naun but fuggles next season. Them goldings äun't worth a sod."

" Harman's done well with his at Mockbeggar."

" Not so bad, nuther. But his ground's different—less water in it. By the way, you want to be set down at Mockbeggar to-night, surelye ? "

" Yes—I haven't seen Maggie this week."

" Nor have I, fur that. But you always wur unaccountable good to Maggie, Frank. Better than her own brothers, I reckon."

" We've always been like brother and sister."

" That's so. She's unaccountable fond of you. Do you know, I wunst thought as how you and she ud wed ? "

" I reckon a good many people thought that."

" Well, why didn't you ? She's a middling fine girl."

Frank was at a loss, and blundered: "She doesn't care for me."

"Reckon she döan't now. She's wed. But she cared for you wunst."

"How do you know?"

"Oh, 'tis easy enough to tell when a maid's in love. She moped unaccountable when you first went to Lunnon. But of course 'out o' sight, out o' mind.' I reckon it wur the same wud you."

Frank hated the big yellow moon that steeped his face in its light, but there was a lucky obtuseness about Coalbran which prevented him seeing all but the obvious. Besides, he was busy with his spanking mare.

"Is to-night or to-morrow the full moon?" asked Rainger.

"To-morrow. Wot d'you mäake of Harman?"

"He's a good enough fellow, and a first-class farmer."

"Better farmer nor he is husband, I reckon."

"He's a bit gruff and grim, but I should say he was a good man at heart. He speaks rough to Maggie and the children, but I'm sure he's unaccountable fond of them. He's like a great barking sheep-dog . . ." Frank stopped abruptly, rather wondering at himself for thus taking Harman's part.

"I reckon Maggie sometimes spiks as she shouldn't ought. She grumbles—and no man 'ull stand a woman's grumbling. I reckon she mäade a mistake marrying a man all that older than herself. Maybe she's sorry now. D'you know, Frank, as how mother—she's the one for unsensible ideas, as we've all larned—she said to me t'other week as she thought Maggie wur in love wud you."

"With me!" Frank laughed rather bitterly.

"That's just mother's unsensible idea. Maggie never töald her naun—I asked her."

"But I often think Maggie doesn't care a pin about me—whether she sees me or not."

"Reckon she cares more'n a pin—after all you've done fur her. But as fur her being in love, I tell you that's

only mother's unsensible idea. Howsumdever I thought I'd ask you in case you suspicioned it."

"I suspicion nothing of the kind. She's fond enough of Harman underneath, only he wears her to strings, poor girl. Here we are at the gates, Tom. Don't trouble to go up the drive—set me down here."

Tom pulled up the mare, and Frank climbed down from the gig. He felt unhappy and unstrung, and angry with Tom for making him so.

§ 18

Maggie was in the kitchen, sitting by the fire with the last baby on her knee. She wore a blue and white check gown, for which she had grown too plump—a shawl hid the fact that it would scarcely meet over her bosom. She looked old for her age, and had lost almost all the fresh cream-and-butter beauty which had made her so sweet at nineteen, but to Frank her wide, rather lined face, with its anxious eyes, and mouth still full and placid though the lips were pale, was the loveliest face in all the world, since whatever its changes it must always be the face of the woman he loved.

"Good evenun, Frank," she said slowly, without much enthusiasm.

He smiled with the pleasure of seeing her. He had not yet begun to feel the pain.

"I haven't been round for a long time, Maggie. I meant to have come before."

"Harman's out."

"But he'll be in to supper."

"Not till late. He's over at Benenden."

"I thought maybe he'd be at Rye Market."

"No—he's missing this once. There's an auction at Coldblow Farm."

Frank sat down on the opposite side of the hearth. The firelight danced on them, these two who had so short a while ago been young together, but now were growing so

queerly, prematurely old. There were lines on his face as well as hers, fine, branching lines round the eyes, from happiness and laughter, and deep slashed lines about the mouth, from struggle and pain. The story of the last nine years was written on his face—all the happiness and hardness of his service of the ground, showing in his burnt and coarsened skin, his lined, screwed eyes; all the long ache and desire of his love, showing in the fierce, drooped line of his mouth. Joy and grief were equally mixed in his face, which was the face of the man who has made the double payment for good and evil—in the sweat of his brow, and in sorrow.

Maggie suddenly put down the baby and told it to run away. Frank noticed that her eyes were swollen; she had been crying—which was odd, as Harman had been out all day, and she seldom cried without his causing it.

"Had a busy day, Maggie?"

"I dunno—more or less."

"Tom and I have been in Rye looking at the cattle. But we didn't buy. He took me to see a ship they're building down at Gasson's Wharf."

"Oh."

"They say she's to run the blockade to America. But I don't know what her cargo is."

"No."

Frank felt discouraged. Maggie had been so often like this of late. Part of the unhappiness and unrest that Tom had stirred up, which had slept in the peace of her company, now revived and jerked him. He seldom felt pain when he was with her—only when he was away.

"Are you busy, Maggie? Would you rather I didn't stay?"

"No. Why?"

"You're so unaccountably short with me."

"I döan't mean it."

She leaned forward over her knees, looking away from him into the fire.

"I sometimes think," he continued, "that you don't

want me here so much. You wouldn't mind now if I went to London."

She did not speak, and he went on—

"You know I like coming. It's one of the pleasures of my life—but I thought you liked it too. Now I feel as if I got in your way."

He saw her broad shoulders move, and at the same time she lifted a corner of her apron to her face. She was crying, and he sickened with self-reproach.

"Maggie, I'm so sorry. I'm a brute—forgive me."

"It äun't you, Frank, it's only—only——"

She began to sob, her face quite hidden in her apron. Swept out out of his usual caution by her trouble, he sprang up, and crossed over to her chair, kneeling down beside her.

"Don't cry, Maggie; I can't bear it."

His arm stole round her, and she dropped her head to his shoulder.

"Oh, Frank, I've mäade a mistäake." . . .

Her words roused him to a sense of what he was doing, but he could not take his arm away. Yet the comfort and simplicity of his embrace had departed; he held her trembling and afraid, and the measure of her sweetness was the measure of his pain.

"I've mäade a mistäake," she drawled again, her cheek rubbing on his shoulder.

"What mistake?"—though he knew.

"I shouldn't ever ought to have married Harman."

"Oh, Maggie." , , ,

"But it's true."

"I should have married you, Frank."

"No, no, no!" he cried for her sake.

"Yes I should. But I wur angry because Dave töald us you'd found another girl. Then Harman cäame back, and he wur kind to me, and I loved him. Had you another girl, Frank?"

"Yes, you know I had."

"But you got shut of her?"

" Yes, but it was too late."

He had ceased to struggle against whatever it was that had thus flung her into his arms after they had been empty all those years. There was something careless, almost jesting, in this stroke of fate which had at last, as it were with a shrug, given them to each other.

" Oh, Frank, I wur a gurt owl."

" But you loved Harman."

" Reckon I did—fur a year abouts. I wur a fool—I might have trusted you."

" You would have been more of a fool to trust me after the way I behaved. I was unworthy of your trust."

" But that girl—you got shut of her."

" Never mind about that girl. The fact remains I was unfaithful to you, and found out how much I loved you only when it was too late."

" Have you loved me all these dunnamany years since you came back ? "

" Reckon I have."

For the first time he attempted a caress. Till then he had just held her, his arms weak with passion, now he lifted his hand and timidly stroked her hair.

" Maggie—how long have you loved me ? Not ever since you stopped loving Harman ? "

" No, I reckon not. I döan't think I've loved you more'n a month or two. It came on suddint like. I wur always fond of you, and likked to have you cöam, and then all of a suddint I began to think wot a fool I'd bin to marry Harman when I might have had you."

" Was that why you didn't like me coming so often ? "

" I did lik you coming—I likked it too much."

" Did you know I loved you ? "

" Reckon I did."

A sudden bellow of wind rang in the cavernous kitchen, and the shadows seemed to draw nearer the hearth, as if the darkness would devour those two who crouched together in the shuttling firelight. Frank realised that he had not kissed her yet. He stooped his lips to her hair,

and as she felt them, she turned on his shoulder, lifting her face, so at last, after all those hungry years, he had her lips. . . .

" What are we to do now, Maggie ? "

" Do ? "

She had become drowsy in his arms, satisfied after his kisses as the parched ground is satisfied after rain.

" Yes—you and I—what are we to do ? "

" Do this, I reckon." She put up her arms, drawing down his mouth to hers again.

" Maggie, I must take you away."

" No, Frank—no." . . .

" But if I am to love you I must take you away."

" Can't you love me here ? "

" When Harman's out ?—like a thief ? "

She turned herself in his arms, hiding her face against his coat. She had slipped from her chair, and they were clinging together on the hearth, like the children they looked in the tender light which had wiped the lines off their faces.

" Oh, Frank, döan't let's think of what's to cöame—just höald me, just let me feel you've got me, that I'm not lonely or miserable any more."

He drew her close, felt the joy of her warm heavy body in his arms, stroked her arms rough with work, and played with, opening and shutting, her hard capable hands.

" Oh, I reckon I wur sweeter to love ten years ago."

" Child, you never were sweeter than you are now."

And he knew then that he loved her all the more because she had lost her slimness and her youth, for all that she had gone through without him, her toil and her childbearing and her love for another man ; he could no longer be jealous of the past, for the past had made the present, and all that she had been made her what she was now.

It was not the ecstatic love of youth which he felt for her, for his youth had left him early. It had been unable to live without hers, and hers had died at marriage. But he did not wish it back, or pray for its thrills to take the

place of the calm sweetness which now was in all his limbs. Besides, he had a passion for her which was better than the passion of youth, less fluid and less windy, not a hot bubbling stream, not a blowing tormenting mystery, but full of sweet familiar darkness like a summer night. . . .

A horse's hoof sounded in the drive, thudding towards the house, with the bowl and rattle of a gig.

" There, you see now," said Frank, softly putting her from him.

" See wot ? "

" That you must come away with me."

" You're not going now ? "

" I must. I won't stay and meet Harman."

" But he'll suspicion——"

" He won't know I've been here. I'll come again to-morrow, and we'll talk things over."

" Frank, I'm scared. I'm scared lest Harman knows I love you."

" He can't know."

" He can—he guesses. He wur angry wud me two nights agone about you. He said I thought more of you than of him."

" What had you been saying ? "

" I disremember."

" Well, the only thing is for you to come with me now. We'll go straight off to Rye."

" Oh, Frank, I couldn't—I couldn't. There's the children."

" I forgot about them," he said gloomily ; " well, we'll settle all that to-morrow. I'll come and see you in the afternoon. But you must let me go now."

They could hear the pawing and jolting of Harman's horse in the yard. He was evidently stabling him himself, the harness jingled as he took it off. Frank drew Maggie into his arms.

" My child . . . my love."

She laughed and said : " My little boy."

They kissed each other less as lovers than as in the days when they had been boy and girl together. Then he went out.

The west was black, pricked with the Sign of the Water-bearer. The west wind still blew, and strangely enough it had not finished the song it had sung through the spars of the building ship. Frank heard it call him as it had called him then. It was strange, he thought, that this voice should still come from the western stars now that at last he had won the woman he loved, after serving for her, like Jacob, long years of bondage to the ground.

§ 19

All that night Frank could hear the west wind fiddling over the barn roofs as he lay and thought of Maggie. At first his thoughts merely rested in her, as his body had rested in her arms. He found comfort and delight in his mind's image of her, and in the knowledge that he now might handle and worship his image without fear. He saw her quiet as a new-sown field, homely as afternoon. It was no longer pain to think of her, and no longer excitement ; he no longer unquietly conjectured as to Harman's dealings with her. Harman was now outside her life, however close he might stand to her in space and time. The very motherhood with which he had endowed her was his no more, but part of the dowry she brought to her lover.

Thus Frank rocked in the cradle of his mind's content, till in time his comfort over-reached itself, and he became so sure of his possession that his thoughts had to go forward another stage and consider what he was to do with it. He could not hold Maggie secretly like a stolen coin, rather he must hold her like a stolen field, which a man grabs in courage and keeps in defiance. There were courses open —either he loved her secretly at Mockbeggar, her husband's slave through fear, or he took her away openly to share the new life which he must make. He could not do the

first, so the second was all he need think about, and from it his thoughts galloped a fresh stage, bringing him to the realisation that he had once more sacrificed Maggie to his daring.

He had settled down at Moon's Green in the resolve to make her life more tolerable, to give her in himself a friend and counsellor, a wall between her and the wind. For years he had struggled, with varying success, to be all this to her, and the end of it was that he was taking her out of her refuge, hurling her against far worse storms than those from which he had tried to protect her. He was taking her away from the establishment and protection of her husband's name, from her children, from comfort, from her family and friends, and he had to give her in return nothing but his love—without comfort, security, or reputation. Dared he ask her to make this sacrifice? He knew that he could, if it was true that she loved him, and if she did not love him she would not make it.

Nevertheless it was a humiliating end to all his high-souled endeavours. Why had he for all those years striven to save her from the bludgeoning of others if at the end of them he was himself to strike her down? And was Maggie of the stuff of which adventurers are made? How would she fare with him in a world of uncertain fortune? So had his peaceful thoughts at last brought forth distracting questions, as eggs hatch snakes. . . .

He tossed to and fro, while the high wind roared round the moon, and when at last the corn-coloured light was in the sky, and the wind had dropped to a soft murmur and shudder in the orchard, he fell asleep, worn out by the fatigue of great possessions.

§ 20

The next afternoon he went over to Mockbeggar. He was quite unexcited, almost without elation. It was strange to think how thrilled, how convulsed with excitement he had sometimes been when he went to meet Rita.

But it was not only departing youth which made the difference. He wanted Rita as a man wants fruit and honey, but he wanted Maggie just as a man wants bread.

The afternoon was gently blurred with sunshine, the sky pale, almost milky, and low above the woods. In the lane were the first dead leaves, fallen without wind, their edges crimson. The air was still, and seemed charged with a watery thickness which the sunshine tried in vain to penetrate—as if there were substance in the scent of hops that came from the oast-houses and the stripping bines, and in the hot chaffy smell of ripe corn and the heat-cracked earth from which it grew.

Frank knocked at the kitchen door at Mockbeggar, and Maggie opened it, wiping floury hands on her apron. Her broad face was pale, and there was an incongruous restlessness in her eyes, so placidly set.

" I thought maybe you wouldn't come."

" Maggie ! "

" It wur unaccountable sträange yesterday—and tar'ble."

" It was blessed." . . .

He took her in his arms and she yielded sweetly, parting her lips for his kisses, giving him her firm short neck, milk-coloured and milk-smelling, to stroke.

" Is this strange ?—is it tar'ble ? " he asked her.

At the same time he knew it did not delight her as it delighted him—her training as a wife had taught her to accept caresses as she accepted tasks, with docility but without enthusiasm. Another woman might have allowed less, but allowed it more ecstatically.

They sat close together on the settle, and he took her hand, turning it over and over in his own.

" Well, child, I've been thinking, and there's only one thing to be done. You must come away with me."

She did not speak, but her lips parted, and she made a little sound in her throat.

" We'll go wherever you like—either to some country place, where I'll get work on the land, or maybe buy an acre or two of my own—I've saved a little—or we'll go

to London and I'll be clerk again . . . that shows how much I love you," he added with a wry smile.

Once again her throat gave that little moan which cats sometimes give when they call their little ones.

"We might have gone to America," he said; "but there's that hemmed war. I should have liked to emigrate. . . . Perhaps we could still go to Canada."

"Frank! I can't leave the children."

She spoke quickly, after clearing her throat.

"You can't, my dear?" he repeated in a daze.

"No. I can't. I've bin thinking too. I lay awake all night."

"But the children, Maggie—do you love them more than me?"

"They're littler than you—and I'm their mother."

"Don't."

"I lay awake all night, thinking and fretting."

"But, Maggie, if you don't come away with me, what are we to do? I can't be your lover in your husband's house. That's out of the question."

"I doan't want that, nuther."

"Then what do you want?"

She burst into tears.

"I want you to go."

"Maggie!"

He half sprang up, but she seized his coat and pulled him down.

"Döan't be angry wud me, Frank. It's only that I'm so tedious unhappy."

"And you'd be happier if I went?"

"Maybe I cud forgit you then."

"Maggie, Maggie," he cried, seizing her by the wrists, and almost shaking her in his desperation, "you're driving me mad. I don't believe you love me, or you couldn't speak like this."

"I do love you, Frank, and if it wurn't fur the children, I'd go wud you to-morrer."

The thought of the children pulled him up short. He

could not plead with Maggie to forsake them, and yet he could not understand why she loved them so. She seldom spoke tenderly either of or to them, and slapped them more often than she kissed.

"If you loved me, you couldn't talk of forgetting me. I shall never forget you, if I go across the world."

"It would be better if you did."

"But I can't—that's the point; and you apparently think you can. You don't love me, and if you don't, how is it that you can let me kiss and stroke you?—Oh, by God, you're used to being pawed by a man at his pleasure, and you'll accept anything——"

"Döan't, Frank—your face is horrible."

He harked back: "You can't love me if you think I've just to go away for you to forget me."

"I'm only being sensible."

At that a strange pity seized him, and smoothed his working face. She sat beside him, her hands folded in her lap, the tears rolling slowly down her cheeks, the corners of her mouth drooped but still. She was like a field, responding to sun and rain, but deep down in herself reserved, inscrutable. All that he was sure of was that she did not love him—not really. She had been harrowed by his continual presence into fancying herself in love; his kindness and her husband's tyranny had combined to deceive her, but now she was beginning to know the secret of her own heart—that she loved only the father of her children. Maggie was swayed by instinct, not by emotion. Her feeling for Frank was an emotion and she could subdue it and forget it in the interests of her feeling for her children, which was an instinct, and would hold her to the end. It was the same with Harman—in spite of rubs and discords, she would always be loyal to him, because he was her mate, and had given her her little ones. She would not have cuckolded him in his house even if Frank had been willing to do so. As for the endearments which she had accepted, they had meant to her little or nothing—passionless as the earth she could not guess how much those few caresses

had meant to her lover. She had no knowledge of the delight of love, merely of its procreative force, and where there was only delight she hardly recognised it as love at all. What had been so wonderful to him was nothing to her, a mere amorous civility, and what he could not understand was the firm foundation of her conduct and her life.

So instead of being angry with her, he accepted her, as one accepts the weather. He did not even pity her now, for in her passionless way she fulfilled herself.

"Very well, Maggie," he said quietly. "Perhaps you're right to put your children before me. As you say, they're little, and I'm not. I can look after myself and they can't."

"I'm only being sensible."

"You're right—and you're unaccountable lucky."

She wiped the tears off her face with her apron.

"Döan't be unhappy, Frank."

"I'm not. I don't feel anything, except—cold. But I think. I think how all these years I've tried to atone for my fault towards you by making you happy, and all I've done is to make you miserable. I wanted to atone, and this is the result."

"I äun't miserable, Frank."

"No, you're too sensible. I wish you'd be too sensible to quarrel with Harman. I can't bear to think of you when I'm gone, with no one to take your part."

"I'll try and not quarrel so much. But I'd lik you to go, Frank."

"My child, I couldn't stay."

"If you stayed I couldn't tell you things lik I used. I'd be always wretched, wanting to go away wud you and knowing as I couldn't leave the children."

"And if I went you'd forget me."

"Maybe."

She turned to him after a brief silence.

"You mustn't think, Frank, as I döan't love you. I do love you unaccountable, and I wish I'd married you instead of Harman. But since I've married Harman, I reckon I

belong to him. Last night when he wur asleep beside me I thought how, seemingly, he wur just a part of myself, whether I wanted it or no. I thought as how if I left him, even if 'twas fur a man I loved better, it 'ud be lik tearing my own self in pieces. He's my man and I'm his woman, and we've our children to care for and fend for. There wur baby lying in her liddle bed 'long side of ourn. . . . I couldn't leave her, Frank." . . .

"No, dear—you couldn't. You couldn't go against the laws of Nature, for you're her own child. I was a fool to have asked it of you. Well, I'm going now. You won't see me again."

"Wull you leave Moon's Green?"

"I shall have to—for a time, at any rate."

"Where 'ull you go?"

"God knows—I must think."

He stood up, then stooped and pulled her up to him by her wrists.

"I must kiss you good-bye. I know it means nothing to you, but it means a lot to me."

He held her to him, and she hid her face against his sunburnt cheek.

"I love you unaccountable, Frank."

"But I'm not your man."

Then suddenly he felt her stiffen and shudder in his arms, for, looking over his shoulder, she saw what he could not see—Harman standing in the doorway.

§ 21

He loosed his hold, and she fell back from him, breathing heavily. He saw now, and stepped in front of her. Harman stood motionless, but his face was turning slowly red, a dusty brick-red swelling with purple veins.

"Well, woman," he said at last, "so this is how you spend your time when I'm out."

"I was saying good-bye to her," said Frank thickly. "I'm leaving Moon's Green."

" That's news. Reckon you mäade up your mind to it just when you saw me."

It never occurred to Frank to put on a careless attitude, and treat the embrace which Harman had witnessed merely as a commonplace farewell between two people who had been friends from childhood. Since their childhood he and Maggie had never kissed except in love, and he was still giddy with the passion of holding her and bending her back as his mouth pressed on her mouth.

" I made up my mind to go," he said, " as soon as I saw Maggie didn't love me."

" She didn't look as if she didn't love you a minute a-gone."

" She allowed me to kiss her good-bye as a special favour. She does not love me. If she did I should not be going."

Harman took a step forward and clenched his fist. Then Maggie spoke.

" Döan't be angry, Harman. He's never said nor done aught that äun't honourable and true."

" It looks unaccountable lik it," said Harman.

" I came here to-day," continued Frank, " to ask Maggie to come away with me. She refused, and I am to go away alone."

" You wudn't have asked her if you hadn't been thick wud her afore. Men döan't ask other men's wives to go off wud them unless they're thick wud them, I reckon."

" I am not thick with Maggie."

" Can you swear to me you never kissed her till this moment ? "

Frank looked at Maggie, and hesitated, though not for long.

" I loved her before she married you."

" And because of that you kiss her now ? "

" I kissed her then."

" And never between now and then ? "

Maggie interrupted. " He kissed me yesterday. But that wur the fust time since I wed you, Harman."

He turned on her furiously.

" He kissed you because you allowed it, I reckon. You gave ' special favours ' yesterday as well as to-day. He wudn't be here to-day, asking you to go off wud him, if you'd bin a true wife to me yesterday. Be hemmed to you fur a light, lying bitch ! "

Maggie began to cry.

" Harman, döan't be hard on me, nor on him. We forgot ourselves yesterday. I did, and that mäade him forget, though he's bin honourable wud me all these years. Then last night I thought of the children——"

" Höald your tongue, and döan't dare talk of your children."

He came forward into the room, and she shrank back from him close to Frank. He stood looking down on her, and spoke indistinctly through his clenched teeth :

" Fur weeks now, I've doubted you. You've not bin to me the wife you should ought. Many's the time I've seen you weeping. You've held back from me, and now I know why—you wur sick for another man's kisses. And you talk of your children—now, when you're tousled from your paramour's fondling." . . .

A sudden gleam came into his eye. He raised his hand and struck Frank across the face.

For a moment Rainger saw red. He seized Harman by the shoulders and began to shake him. Then he pushed him away.

" You're right," he said, and laughed.

" Git out of my pläace," said Harman.

" I'm going, but before I go I swear to you that Maggie is innocent. She has let me kiss her because she's sorry for me—that's all. I built presumptuously on her compassion, but she herself has been more faithful to you than you deserve."

He looked hesitatingly at Maggie. What would Harman do to her when he was gone ? Her eyes were not asking him to stay, and the next moment, as if she read his question, she said—

"Harman's right—you'd better go. I'll talk to him."

He turned once more to the husband.

"For God's sake don't be hard on her—she deserves nothing but good of you."

"Reckon I know how to treat my wife."

He spoke angrily, but there was a rough tenderness in the look he turned on Maggie. Frank became again, and more willingly, aware of the sound kind qualities beneath Harman's biblical sternness. He saw that in leaving husband and wife together he was doing his best for both. He himself only tangled an explanation. After all, in spite of Maggie's clinging and kisses, he was the unwanted lover. Harman was her man, he possessed her, and even if he beat her it would be no more than what she would accept—what in her heart of hearts she would rather have than her lover's kisses.

"Good-bye, Maggie."

"Döan't spik to her. And döan't think you're through wud this. If I put her away——"

For the first time a long, bitter cry broke from Maggie.

"Harman, fur pity's säake—I swear I've bin true—I swear——"

"Hold your tongue, woman."

He roughly put his arm about her, and drawing her close to him, stifled her outcry. And in that strange embrace Frank was obliged to leave them.

§ 22

He went back to Moon's Green, but sat bruised and dumb at the supper-table, and when night came he felt the hideousness of shutting himself up in his room, since he could not shut out care or grief. He waited till the household was in bed, then went softly down, and unbolting the side door slipped out into the dark.

The night was warm and windless and thick with stars. Lifting his eyes to the black arch of the zenith he saw them strewn over it like dust, and at his feet in the thick, dark

waters of the dyke they were also strewn. The rest of the night was impenetrable, mere blocked and blotted shapes, blackness merging into blackness, trees and gable-ends that he saw only because of the stars they wiped out. He walked in the oozing, sucking grass beside the dyke, guiding himself by its channel of mock stars. He wished he could see the ground and the willows, all the dear homely things of day. In this great star-spattered darkness he felt strangely cut off and ignored. Even the familiar constellations, which night after night he had known, till they had become almost as common and friendly as the lights of farms, now looked unreal and remote. The Great Plough turning slowly round the Pole, the shining Lady in her Chair, the Scales, the Crab, the Waterman—all the pictures of the sky which he had loved from childhood—now seemed to mock him, the suffering man. They mocked him for his tiny preoccupation of space and time and human dust. He felt that the fields and the earth knew what he suffered and felt with him, who was their child, clay of their clay; but the stars had no part in earth or in him, they belonged to a consciousness which stood above and beyond his pain.

He groped his way off the marsh into the little lane running across it to Ethnam, and here with the white glimmer of the road under his feet, he felt less swallowed up in the night, and his thoughts were able to move less oppressedly. His thoughts wounded him, and yet he knew that only by thought he could break through the choking net of pain which was over him. He must think if he was to act, he must act if he was to survive.

He wondered what Harman would do to Maggie. Would he fulfil his half-made threat and put her away? Local precedent would allow him to send her back to her mother in disgrace. Farmer's wives in the Isle of Oxney were not allowed to give even the small change of love away from their masters, and moreover he could not prove that he and Maggie had done no more than mingle a few tears and kisses. They had had good opportunity for a long

intrigue, and he saw that Harman's rage had merely been the boiling over of suspicions which had seethed for months. He might even get a divorce—he was rich, and the evidence, though inconclusive, was malignant. The thought of a divorce could not enter Frank's heart without a thought of the marriage which would follow; but it gave him no joy. He knew that Maggie would be utterly wretched, torn ignominiously out of Mockbeggar, away from her children and the man whom despite judges and decrees she would always look upon as her lawful possessor. Besides, he felt that he had underrated the genuineness of her attachment to Harman and exaggerated the sentimental, restless yearning which his own love and long service had stirred up in her. It would be cruel indeed if she were to be taken at the face value of her actions, and the deep roots of natural instinct and affection, which were grown into the very fibre of her heart, torn out and transplanted.

He tried to reassure himself that Harman loved her too sincerely to put her away, either legally or informally. He told himself that her only lapse was too slight for judgment, that Harman could not and would not live alone with his motherless children. Indeed he knew that his fears were running away with his intelligence. But they were no less dreadful because they were ghosts, their gibberings were even more horrible than valid reasonings, their presence more permeating because of their dream-like quality. And apart from fear stood out the solid fact that he had brought Maggie to shame and anguish, that he had ended his long years' service and devotion by offering her up on the altar he had built for his own sacrifice.

There was a wan streak in the eastern sky, and against it hedges and trees stood out black and rugged. Rain began to fall—invisible in the dusk. It splashed into the dykes and the Reading Sewer, and hissed into the long grass beside the lane. Frank felt the taste of it on his lips and the blur of it in his eyes as he turned homewards.

The wet barn-roofs gleamed in the white light, the first things to stand out of the darkness. They patched the scattering dusk, and as the darkness faded the rain became visible, falling grey and steady in the dawn.

§ 23

After he had washed and shaved and tidied himself, Frank did not show much trace of his night. His face—sunburnt, highly coloured, with its narrow laughing eyes and thatch of red hair—was not the type to show grief easily or bear the stamp of it long. His appearance at breakfast aroused no comment, and though his silence might on any ordinary occasion have been remarked it was that morning swallowed up in the commotion following an announcement made by Tom just before he came into the room.

"You're a tedious gurt owl, Thomas," said Dave, when he had pouched his mouthful of bread and bacon with a view to distinct utterance. "Why shud you go fighting furriners' battles?"

"You'll be killed," said Mrs. Coalbran.

"I must say as how," continued David, "wunst is enough to tempt Providence. And a man of your age, too—thirty-nine come Michaelmas."

"That's naun, and I've had but one bout of rheumatics, which is wot counts to a farmer more'n years."

Dave's Eliza broke in—

"All those nasty niggers too. I shudn't lik to fight along of a lot o' niggers."

"I äun't going to fight along o' niggers."

"Well, the South Americans is niggers, äun't they?"

"No, they äun't."

"I thought that wur wot the war wur about."

"Then you thought silly. We're fighting because of the niggers, not along of 'em."

"'We'!—hark to that! That's him and the South Americans; and I'm hemmed if I'd fight because of niggers

any more than along of 'em. Wot's niggers to you ? There äun't none hereabouts."

Frank listened dejectedly. He knew now that he had entertained a vague hope of persuading Tom to leave Moon's Green with him, and help him to run a little farm somewhere else. Now he must go alone. Tom was a fool. Hadn't the Crimea been enough for him ?

" They say it's been awful in Virginia," he broke in, " the wounded and dying lying in the swamps with no one to tend them, and sometimes the forest catching fire and burning them all up."

Mrs. Coalbran began to weep. Dave's Eliza clucked her tongue, and brushed a crumb off Dave's waistcoat.

" I doan't care," said Tom. " Reckon I'll never have a chanst of another fight if I döan't täake this one. I dessay you're right, and it's none o' my quarrel, but it'll be my war if I go out there, säum as in Russia. It's a better war than the Crimea, too—less lying around and freezing on your stomach. They say there's more men bin killed in this war than any there's ever bin—they say as there's things bin found out about armies as 'ull justabout change all the wars to cöame—and new guns, and new armour fur ships, and shells as bust in the air and throw bullets around——"

" It sounds unaccountable pleasant," said Dave sarcastically. " You'll be mäaking me want to go too in another minnut."

" When do you start ? " asked Frank.

" When the *Margaret Monypenny* sails from Rye—early in the fall, I reckon."

" Maybe you'll be drownded in the sea before you get across," suggested Mrs. Coalbran.

" Maybe he'll never be such a fool as to start," said Dave's Eliza.

" Not much chanst of that, I'm afraid," sighed her husband—" fur a mild-mannered, soft-spoken man, Tom, you're unaccountable bloodthirsty."

" I lik fighting and wars."

" You wur justabout glad to git höame from Russia."

" And maybe I'll be justabout glad to git höame from America, but I mean to go there fust."

" And maybe," said Dave's Eliza briskly, " when you git there the Americans 'ull say they döan't want you butting into their war, and 'ull send you back where you belong. Meddlers make mischief."

At that moment the discussion was interrupted by the entrance of Pilbeam the cowman with a note for Frank.

" Passon's man give it to me, muster, and säum time Boord wur over from Mockbeggar wud a ward fur the missus, asking her as she'd go and see Missus Harman this wunst."

Frank felt his cheeks grow hot and his back cold. He did not read his note, but sat stupidly listening to Mrs. Coalbran's exclamations and conjectures.

" Maggie ! Wot can she be wanting wud me all sudden of a morning ? Did Boord say she wur ill, Pilbeam ? "

" No, mum, he said naun säave as how wud you go over soon as wunst, and as how their gurt sow had farrowed."

" That can't be why. Maggie's a tedious plague. She äun't wud child, nuther. I've half a mind not to go."

" I'll drive you over in the trap," said Tom. " I've an errand to Sluice Farm."

" Well, maybe I'd better go, since she's so pressing. She's my own darter, and I haven't seen her for more'n a week. There may be summat wrong."

" You're always the one fur thinking of summat wrong," said Dave. " Reckon she only wants to sell you a little pig."

" It 'ud be one of you men if she wanted to do that. Wot's your letter about, Frank ? You look unaccountable vrothered."

" Parson wants to see me."

" Dear, dear—we all seem to be wanted everywheres. Come along of Tom and me in the trap—we'll give you a lift as far as the Throws."

§ 24

Frank's thoughts were not enviable as he jolted with Tom and Mrs. Coalbran in the trap, and afterwards walked from Four Throws to Wittersham Parsonage. His only comfort was to know that now he would be spared all difficulty in leaving Moon's Green—indeed it was possible that the Coalbrans might want to kick him out neck and crop before he had anywhere to go. He wondered what Maggie would tell her mother, what Mrs. Coalbran would think, and what she would pass on.

He also wondered why Mr. Bellack wanted him at the Parsonage. He half suspected it was because of Maggie, and his suspicions were soon confirmed.

"Well, Frank," said Mr. Bellack after very few preliminaries, "so you've gone the way of Judah and neighed after your neighbour's wife."

As he spoke he pushed aside a pile of manuscript on which he had been busy; Frank caught the headline—*Darwin and Moses; or, New Chains for Old.* He was chafed by an impression that his affairs were merely interrupting Bellack. The thought combined with his tutor's words to irritate him, and he rapped out—

"Please don't speak to me like that."

"I beg your pardon," said Bellack surprisingly.

"I suppose you've seen Harman?" after a wavering silence.

"Yes, he called here early this morning to ask my advice. We've always been friends, you know."

"And he wanted you to speak to me?"

"No, he wanted to speak to you himself, but I thought it as well to offer myself as a substitute."

"Um—I'm not sure it wouldn't be better to let the two men most concerned have things out between them."

"If you were the only two concerned, I'd agree. But there's Maggie."

Frank moved so that he stood with his back to the light.

"Maggie, sir . . . tell me—what is he doing about

Maggie? He won't—he won't divorce her?—put her away?"

"My dear Frank, are you or are you not an inhabitant of the Isle of Oxney? We don't divorce our erring wives in these parts—we employ a far simpler, readier method, which though less refined is, I take it, just as efficacious."

A red mist hung before Frank's eyes, and he leaned heavily over the writing-table towards the Parson.

"You mean to say he's—he's beaten her?"

"That is the local cure for feminine weakness."

"The blasted bully!"

"Don't be a fool, Frank. You know perfectly well that Maggie expected nothing else. She doesn't feel a bit about it as you do—she's now probably in love with him again."

"Take care—I won't let you insult her simply because you're a clergyman."

"I'm not insulting her—on the contrary. For heaven's sake don't go talking and thinking of Maggie as if she was a heroine of romance. She's something far better. She's a homely woman who expects her husband to beat her when she is unfaithful to him."

"She was not unfaithful."

"By her own confession she was decidedly disloyal. I daresay Harman could not divorce her even if he wanted to, but she acknowledges that she allowed you to kiss her, and at one time thought of accepting you as her lover."

"She never really loved me."

"Of course not—she is incapable of loving away from her instincts."

"Well, I'm shut of her. I shall never see her again."

"That brings me to the point. Harman's one stipulation is that you go away."

"I told him last night I was going."

"But he appears to think that was trumped up on the spur of the moment."

"It was not—though I own that at first I meant to take Maggie with me."

"Where shall you go?"

"I've not the slightest idea."

"Well, don't be too long making up your mind. Maggie won't be happy really till you're gone. Then I promise you she'll soon settle down. Harman's a good fellow, though strict and rough, and she'll be quite happy with him when she hasn't got a younger and pleasanter man to distract her. Tame but true."

"I wish I could believe it."

"You may be quite sure of it. I've known him for years, and I tell you he has a kind heart and sound principles, though in some ways he's primitive and in others a bit methodistical."

"It's a horrible combination."

"I quite understand you dislike it, but it'll do Maggie no harm, and now he's really asserted his authority I expect she'll be more docile—at all events she'll love him better. That's her type—and it's a good type, so don't be angry with me for saying it. Your lady-love is none the worse for being more primitive than romantic."

"You seem to know more about her than I do."

"Perhaps. It's the onlooker's privilege."

"Yes—you're an onlooker. You sit apart from life and watch all the poor humans struggling together like flies in a ditch. You're like God."

"You're angry with me now. But I'm not quite so unscathed as you think. At all events I've looked in the Gorgon's face——"

"And been turned to stone."

"Stuff! you sentimentalist! Frank, you and I are growing apart. I realised that when Harman told me about you and his wife. It was a shock to me. In the old days I should have known something beforehand."

"I'm sorry if you think me unfriendly, sir. The fact is I'm growing away from books and intellectual things. I've hardly opened a book for five years."

"You're certainly more uncouth than you used to be. I suppose you won't go back to London when you leave here?"

"Not I!"

"Then what will you do?"

"I don't know—go farming somewhere else, I suppose. But I shan't stay here. I don't want to."

"Then I can promise Harman that if he will forgive his wife you'll keep away from her?"

"Yes—since she doesn't want me. I couldn't bear to see her again."

He moved slowly towards the door. Something in his burly, stooping figure touched Mr. Bellack's heart.

"I've spoken a bit roughly to you, Frank. I know I haven't been sympathetic, but it's only my bark. Come up here some evening and we'll have a talk about the future. I don't want you to drift away."

"I'll come in a day or two, sir—but at present I'm down and under."

Mr. Bellack stood up, and moved uneasily.

"Well, I won't keep you. I know that though I'm a parson I haven't spoken one word to you about God and the Ten Commandments. But it's too late now. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," mumbled Frank, and went out.

§ 25

He felt that he could not go back to Moon's Green. Probably Mrs. Coalbran would just be returning with her catastrophic news, and he had better keep clear of the whole family for some hours yet.

He started northwards along the Tenterden road, walking furiously, as if he hoped to tire out his mind with his body's exertions. His mind was full of humiliation, sickness and hate. He hated Maggie. He hated her because she would rather be beaten by her husband than caressed by her lover. She had no soul. She was like a mare or a cow—any docile, female animal. And he had given the best years of his life to loving her. He had given long years of labour, service and self-oblation to an animal. She was

nothing more. Her love for her children was worth no more than an animal's blind instinct for its young, her chastity was nothing but an animal's instinctive loyalty to its chosen mate. All the simple greatness which his long comparison of her with the earth had given her, now shrivelled away. She had the spirit of the beast which goeth downward into the earth—that was all.

He went into the inn at Benenden, for the reverse of his hope had been fulfilled, and his mind had worn out his body. He could not eat. From force of habit he ordered bread-and-cheese and beer, but could not touch the food. He drank the beer, and followed it up with three whiskies. He wanted to muddle and addle his brain. The strong drink brought relief. He was unused to spirits, and after his third whisky fell sound asleep, his head on the wooden table.

When he woke up it was twilight. The tap-room window was a square of luminous green, and a wistful yellow light hung like a cobweb in the rafters, so faint and tremulous that it was less light itself than a ghost of light. Frank sat up and stretched himself. His head ached, and there was a sour, rough taste in his mouth. He knew that he had drunk too much, but he was grateful for his sleep, even though it had been rather bestial. He asked for some cold water to drink. Then he paid his reckoning and went out.

His brain was all numb and confused, it had not completely woke up yet. He had a great temptation to go into another inn and put it to sleep again, but enough of his spirit survived to resist that. The dusk was cold, and he tramped fiercely. When he reached Moon's Green he would go straight up to his room. He did not want to meet the Coalbrans that night. He prayed that his brain might not wake up just yet.

He came to the farm, and still it was not quite awake ; and his body was sleepy again too. He would go to bed though it was only half-past seven. He could hear the Coalbrans' voices droning in the kitchen. Supper was going

on, but he sickened at the thought of food. It was sleep he wanted—sleep. And how good it would be if he never woke . . . unless, of course, his body could wake without his mind. He liked his body—he did not want it to sleep for ever. It had always been a good friend to him, and he laid it very kindly and comfortably upon the bed, wrapping the coverlet round it, and blessing it for its warmth and strength and the sleep it was going to give him.

§ 26

He was awakened suddenly by a movement in the room. It was quite dark and the window was full of stars.

" Who's there ? " he called surlily, for his first thought was anger at whomsoever had roused him out of forgetfulness.

" It's only me—Tom."

" It's the middle of the night."

" Reckon it's no more'n ten o'clock. They've gone to bed—I waited till then."

" Did you hear me come in ? "

" Reckon I did. I thought maybe you didn't want to spik to any one."

" I didn't."

He turned his back to the big black shape which was Tom. Why had he woke him up, with seven hours of darkness yet to run ?

Tom sat down on the bed with a creak.

" There's summat I want to say to you, Frank—an idea I have in my head. I've heard about you and Maggie."

" Well, what do you think of me ? "

" I döan't think naun partic'lar. Seemingly you two should ought to have wed when you wur boy and gal, but it's too late now, so my advice is to think no more about it."

" But aren't you angry with me for having got your sister into such trouble ? "

" I reckon it wur her doing as well as yourn—and I feel more as if you wur my brother than she wur my sister."

"You're a good chap, Tom. Are Mrs. Coalbran and Dave very angry?"

"Justabout. They say you kept it all so close—there you wur going to Mockbeggar week after week, and they thought it wur naun but kindness."

"I never showed her anything but kindness till two days ago. Hasn't she told them that?"

"Reckon she has. Howsumdever, they döan't believe her."

"And Harman—does he believe her?"

"I dunno. But he's willing to forgive her if you go away and never see her agäun—and that brings me to the idea I have in my head. Would you lik to come out wud me in the *Margaret Monypenny?*"

"To America?"

"Surelye."

"To fight, Tom?"

"Yes. Didn't I wanst tell you as there's no cure for love lik going fur a soldier?"

Frank laughed bitterly.

"But I don't care tuppence about their silly old quarrel."

"Nor do I, but we shan't fight none the worser for that. Wur there anywheres else you'd thought of going?"

"No—but I don't see myself as a soldier."

"We'd be together, Frank."

As he sat on the bed Frank could smell him, saturated as he was with the thick ammoniacal smells of the stable and cow-yard. There was, too, something bovine in his huge stooping body, black against the star-filled casement. . . . It would be good to be always with this creature, this great kind shaggy animal who loved him.

"When does the *Margaret Monypenny* sail?"

"Next week, I reckon. You cud kip on here till then. Dave 'ull be less vrothered to-morrer, and Harman wöan't mind as long as you döan't see Maggie."

"What you none of you seem to realise is, that I don't want to see Maggie. I'm not going away because Harman wishes it, but because I wish it myself."

The flash of his anger was lost in Tom's tranquillity like lightning in a blanket.

" Well—cöame wud me."

" You're a good fellow, Tom."

He put out his hand and took Tom's huge hairy one. The feel of him and the smell of him were like the dead Luke Coalbran's—the memory of Luke brought a half-forgotten incident to Frank's mind.

" I remember once how I saved Maggie a beating from your father—now I've got her into trouble again, and this time I haven't been able to stand between her and her punishment."

" Reckon you've had more punishment than her—now as then. I tell you Harman 'ull forgive her if you go away, and she'll forgit all about it."

Frank stifled another laugh in the pillow. Then he turned to Tom.

" Very well. I'll come with you, Tom. You're the only friend I've got in the world, and it would be terrible lonely if I let you go. I don't particularly want to fight—but as you say, it may help me to forget ; and as I don't care what becomes of me, I may make a good soldier."

" I'm glad, Frank, unaccountable glad. We'll tell the others to-morrow and mäake our plans."

He stretched his great arms, and yawned.

" Don't leave me, Tom."

" Can't you sleep ? "

" I don't think so. You take my bed, and I'll sit in the chair alongside."

" Come into my room, and we'll both git into the bed."

" No. I'd sooner stay here. I don't want to lie down—I slept a bit this afternoon."

After some mutterings and grumblings Tom undressed to his shirt, and got into Frank's bed, having knelt down and said the same prayer as he had learned from his mother when he was a little boy of three.

In five minutes he was sound asleep, and Frank, comforted by his presence, sat staring out at the sky. The

room faced west, and he watched the slow movement of the western constellations. The west wind puffed and throbbed no longer—it had ceased to call him as it had called him through the spars of the *Margaret Monypenny*. But perhaps there was hope in the west, just as there was light there now that the sun had left the Old World. The day had gone from him—he would pursue the day. And then he remembered where he was going—to a land of war and famine and scarcity, to a land of hatred and death, of oppression and desolation. He laughed. That was the day he was pursuing. A meteor fell slowly among the stars; he saw it drop into the woods, cleaving the sky like a fiery sword.

PART IV

THE RED KING'S DREAM

I

§ 1

TOWARDS the close of the year '61, the schooner *Margaret Monypenny* entered the Cape Fear River, North Carolina. She had successfully run the United States blockade with a cargo of small-arms. Indeed she had done little more than sight a Federal gunboat, which before it could bear down on her had been tackled by the Confederate privateer *Jonesville*, and kept at bay at the price of the *Jonesville's* fore-royal and two Tennessee gunners who had never seen the sea till they came aboard her.

A tug met the *Margaret Monypenny* at the mouth of the river, and towed her up towards Wilmington between pine-shagged bluffs. There was nothing in the landscape to raise Frank's spirits—which had not borne up well against a six-weeks' voyage on a lumpy sulky sea. The Greater Dismal Swamp and the Lesser Dismal Swamp stretched north and south from the Cape Fear River, America's greeting to love's refugee—ragged wind-bitten pines, salt-water marshes, dull lightless pools beside which rotted the trunks of fallen trees. . . .

Well, at least he had no high-pitched expectations. He had come away from his country and his friends, from his home and the woman he loved, to fight a strangers' quarrel in a strange land. Though the future could not be worse than the past it was not likely to be much better. His

highest hope must not be more than to exchange, so to speak, the Greater Dismal Swamp for the Lesser Dismal Swamp.

Beside him on the deck sprawled Tom Coalbran, spelling out with knitted brows the last of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which, being "about niggers," had struck him as suitable reading for one going to take up arms in the Southern cause. He had bought it at Bristol, where the *Margaret Monypenny* had shipped her cargo, and it had lasted him the voyage, with occasional help from Frank and the skipping of the more edifying parts.

His attention wandered as the bluffs narrowed, and the saltwash ebbed from the river. On the banks were small, compact and—to his Kentish experience—strangely neat farms. He stared curiously at their low, verandahed roofs as the *Margaret Monypenny* glided by in the wake of the snuffling, snorting little *Pamlico Belle*. He did not speak to Frank, for he saw he was in one of his silent, unfriendly moods, when the kindest words seemed to rub a heart stung raw by buzzing memories. A simple soul, he attributed Frank's sometimes ill-tempered silences to a superior mentality. He did not pretend to understand the full suffering of this being who was, he knew, of a subtler, fierier mould than he. If Frank's tragedy had been anybody else's he would have looked upon it as rather humorous—that anybody should fall in love with sister Maggie, who had lost her looks and weighed twelve stone, struck him as a bit of a joke; he only wished that Frank had not been the joker.

However, here they were in America, and here at last was Wilmington, looking very clean and sunny, and busy too, with the harbour chock-a-block with barques and schooners and clippers and steamers, all busily unlading the merchandise which had evaded the watchfulness of Uncle Sam. The sun shone down through the ratlines of the *Margaret Monypenny*, and as the ship hove-to against the wharf and the breeze of her motion died away, Tom found it unaccountable warm for November.

§ 2

It was not till late in the afternoon that Frank and Tom landed. They had first to satisfy the officials of President Davis's government that they were not Union spies. It was not till their papers and baggage had been examined and pronounced in order that at last they were allowed to set foot on American soil. By that time they were both extremely hungry, and their first move was to an eating-house, close to the docks.

They both felt rather subdued by their new surroundings—Frank even more than Tom, for Tom had seen the strange life of Russian villages, whereas Frank had never been out of England. The fact that they were in a town where the English language was spoken and customs akin to English customs were observed seemed only to emphasise the general difference. The points of contrast jumped out all the more violently from their familiar surroundings—the new-world colloquialism glared from the old-world phrase, while the strange twang almost disguised the homely vocabulary. Of course, Frank and Tom, being Kentishmen, both spoke with a drawl, but the Wilmington drawl was nasal, whereas theirs was guttural.

Their meal was strange too—the bread tasted different, and the only meat available was ham, which had not been cured according to the manner of the Isle of Oxney. The pudding, too, was like nothing they had ever tasted—a queer pulse of Indian corn strongly flavoured with cinnamon.

"Reckon," said Tom, "as how these Southerners are unaccountable short of foodstuffs. If we'd wanted a good dinner we should have joined the Union."

"I'll join it still, if you like," said Frank, "I don't mind which side of the fence I'm on."

"Wot, fight along of the chaps wot ran away at Bull Run? I'd sooner fight along of the Cossacks. *They* generally faced right ways about."

"Well, we oughtn't to lose any time. It's getting on for five o'clock."

" Queer to think it's night in the Isle of Oxney."

For a moment Frank saw the Isle with the familiar constellations hanging over it—those signs which had been slowly changing as he came southward to the new life—he saw the house-front of Mockbeggar washed in moonlight, he saw Maggie's bedroom loomed with shadows, and Maggie asleep with her hair loose and free, and the baby between herself and Harman, to keep it warm. . . .

He was roused by the refusal of the bony damsel in the checked overall, who waited on them, to accept their paper money—

" Say, we don't take shin-plasters."

" But, miss, these wur give us at the quay in exchange fur our English money."

" We don't take them here."

" Well, wot are we to do ? We've got naun else."

" I'll ask the boss, but I don't calculate he'll take them."

However, the boss proved less exacting than his hand-maiden. As the guests were strangers he agreed to take their money on condition that no change was given. Three two-dollar bills were handed over in exchange for the ham, the hominy, and the corn-pone, and the two men left the eating-house feeling that the sooner they enlisted and were fed at State expense the better.

They turned up a street which seemed to lead from the harbour into the heart of the town. As they walked on it became more and more crowded, and shops and saloons abounded. After a while it struck Frank that the shabby grey-coated figures which mottled the crowd were soldiers. At first, down at the docks, he had taken them for porters, and then later for street-sweepers or some such municipal underlings. It was not till he had seen one or two groups of them march past in military formation that he realised their nature. Hardly any of them were armed, and these in the most casual way, and none seemed to have a complete uniform—either it was the coat without the trousers or the trousers without the coat, or

perhaps merely a badged hat worn with ordinary civilian clothes.

"I reckon, Tom, you won't cut such a fine figure in this army as you did in the Queen's."

"I reckon not, Frank. Howsumdever, I äunt sure as that grey's not a better colour for fighting in than the Queen's scarlet. You cud see us fur miles in the snow round Sebastopol—now these men 'ud never be seen at all on a dull day."

"We'd better look out for a recruiting sergeant or a recruiting officer."

"There goes a man wud stripes on his sleeve. I'll stop him."

So they stopped Sergeant Gurney of the 18th Alabama, who gladly took them to a recruiting dépôt off the main street. Good fighting men were at a premium in the Confederate States, whose armies had been badly bled at Bull Run and the Potomac. It was not likely that any obstacles would be put in the way of the enlistment of two strapping fellows, though they had been but three hours on American soil. It took only a few words and a few drinks to transform Frank and Tom into Private Rainger and Private Coalbran of the 14th South Carolina (Colonel Brandywine).

§ 3

"Columbia,
"South Carolina, C.S.A.
"January 1, 1862.

"DEAR MR. BELLACK,—

"I begin the New Year by fulfilling my promise to write to you, and you must not think that, because I have not done so until now, I have forgotten your great kindness to me during those last days at Moon's Green. I cannot think what I should have done without your help and advice, your patient bearing with my ill-humour and misjudgment. [For I have misjudged you, as I have misjudged most people. Perhaps I was jealous because you were not with me in the dust and scuffle, but looked on me

from a remoteness which I know now is not won without blood. I envied you that high seat, because I see now that the only wish I have is to attain it. My father's mistake was not that he held himself remote from life, but that while still in the cockpit, he tried to hide himself from the wounds and dust. The only way to escape life is to climb above it, and for that way of escape I now strive. But I feel it is not for me. I shall always lack the detachment of the spectator, and I shall never understand. . . .] [1]

"Ever since we landed I have been busy learning to take my place as a defender of somebody else's country. Tom and I enlisted directly we came ashore, as there was nothing to wait for. I shan't tell you anything much about our voyage—it was disappointingly dull. We did not encounter a single gunboat till we were twenty miles from the coast, and that never got within range. The blockade is, I believe, so far very lax—of course the enormous coast-line would be a difficulty for even a bigger navy than the Federals possess. They are building new ships, but then so are we—note the 'we,' please, sir, I've got as far as that.

"Tom is hugely pleased because he has a rifle. They gave it to him, I think, because he is an old soldier. I have not a gun of any sort, indeed not a single weapon. A pretty soldier! you will say, but before you quite despise me, hear that I have half a uniform, a grey home-spun coat buttoning up to my neck, in which I feel very military—more military perhaps than Tom, who, though he may have a gun, drills in the clothes he used to wear at Tenderden Market. The Confederate States seem already to have run short of most necessities. I believe the armament question is better than it was, but we still largely depend on what we take from the Yankees. However, ordnance factories have been started, and who knows but that in time Frank Rainger may have

[1] The parts in the square brackets were eventually suppressed by Frank, and the whole letter was much mutilated by the newly-set-up censorship.

something better to fight the foe with than his fists. As for the commissariat, it varies in different places. Here we are better fed than the troops in, say, Mississippi or Tennesssee. We get bread in plenty, and fresh meat as well. I believe such articles as salt, coffee, tea, and wine are very scarce in the South. However, the spirit of the people is unquenchable as is their hate of the Yankees. I had no idea till I came out here that feeling ran so high ; somehow I had imagined that a war between men of the same race would be fought on more abstract grounds than a war between nations. Of course I was a fool to think any such thing. I believe that in no war has there been so little quarter given, or such wanton and unnecessary slaughter. Hate is made easier and more accessible to the masses by a secondary campaign being waged by the newspapers, which are regular factories of bitterness and bile. The Southern papers teem with horrible stories of Northern atrocities, and the Northern papers, which we often see, are full of similar tales against us. It is rather amusing to watch each side attempt to clear itself of these charges which it apparently can't deny—the Yankees by blaming the Germans who swarm in their ranks, and we by blaming the Indians who helped us in the West.

" I find that there is a widespread idea that England will be persuaded to enter the war, on behalf of the South—people seem to think that after the San Jacinto incident such a course is imperative to her honour as a nation. I try in vain to convince them that what seems to them so vital and universal is to England a mere matter of foreign politics, a domestic affray among strangers. To them the North is so mud-black and the South so glistening white that their light and shadow must be spread over the world. They can't understand our calm detached attitude as spectators, or realise that our chief concern is how much the dearth of cotton affects our industries.

" This is a tremendous long letter I am writing you, and I see I have told you practically nothing about our

life out here nor the people of America as we have found them. At present our time is mostly spent in drilling, route-marching, and such exercises. Tom is deeply disgusted with American military ideas and discipline, but personally I must confess I am not sorry to find I have more freedom and individual opportunity than I expected, or would have found in any British regiment. There is a large number of gentlemen rankers, who have brought their negro servants with them, and as these latter perform many of the duties usually done by privates, we have a comparatively easy time. The officers are elected, and are mostly of the same class as the men, so it happens that the European gulf between officers and men is hardly noticeable here. I tell you that it is no common thing to see officers and men going about together in the town, drinking together in the saloons, and sitting together in the Theatre Royal, Columbia, where some of us occasionally go to see bad plays.

"I expect you would like me to tell you about my comrades, but so far I haven't made many friends. I am blunted for intercourse, and prefer my own rather braken-backed company to the effort of making new acquaintance. The men seem cheerful, decent fellows, very self-willed and undisciplined, but keen as mustard and brave as lions. They come mostly from the Carolinas, but there are several Marylanders among them, and men from other States. The only one I am at all friendly with is an officer—Lieutenant Peter Zollicoffer, a nephew of the General Zollicoffer who was killed at Mill Springs. He is a good-natured, most amusing fellow, and so easy to get on with that his company requires no effort from my rather worn and anæmic powers of conversation. Of course in any army but this such an acquaintanceship would be impossible. I often go and dine with him in the town—he amuses me, and helps me forget things.

"There is some discussion going on here as to which particular shambles—or field of honour, according to one's view—we are destined for. Personally I hope

for Virginia, and Tom would of course give his head to serve under General Jackson, but they say we are more likely to be sent down to the south-west, where matters seem to have gone badly this fall. [I wish they would be quick and send us off, as I don't find this particular kind of soldier's life the certain cure for love that Tom foretold. There are too many empty spaces in the day, and even on the long marches one can think too much—in spite of the singing. I am homesick too. It was a sad day when we left Wilmington, for then I coul'd sometimes go down to the docks and see the masts of the *Margaret Monypenny* standing up among the shipping; and though beyond them lay the country of the Lesser Dismal Swamp, it was not so difficult to recall the marshes of Camber and Winchelsea which I used once to see through her rigging. . . .]

"Well, sir, I must stop now, for the bugle is calling us to the cookhouse door, and rumour says that we are to have pork and beans, and there is a smell which seems for once to substantiate rumour. So good-bye, and I hope you will have time to answer this letter, and to tell me how the country is looking. Note that I confine my inquiries to the land, it is all that I have left in the Isle of Oxney. So tell me if it has been a white or a green Christmas, how the woods are looking, and if many fields have been sown. . . . Has the holly bush at the bottom of Mopesden Lane berried this year?

"Tom sends his remembrances to you and to all at Moon's Green. Please tell Mrs. Coalbran that he is well, and expects a stripe in a week or two. He wants to know if Pudding has foaled yet.

"Believe me, Sir,
"Yours as always,
"FRANK RAINGER."

§ 4

It was not till All Fools' Day that the 14th South Carolina entrained from Columbia for the South. Till

then the routine of camp life was unbroken, while a handful of West Point officers and veterans from the Mexican wars tried to turn a jumble of farmers, cotton-planters, shop-keepers, and mean whites into good soldiers of President Davis and the Confederate States. Then suddenly one morning the alarm was sounded, and the camp was full of men struggling with their baggage, half asleep. They were to entrain at once—destination unknown. They marched to the dépôt and stood there for hours in the rain, while the cold stars of the dawn winked down at them through a tattered scud. Lance-Corporal Coalbran was disgusted, and compared the C.S.A. army disadvantageously with the Queen of England's—in spite of lice and brown-paper boots.

At last the train came in, and the slow process of entrainment began. Some of the men had been able to get hot drinks before they started, but only a few. Most of them—including Frank—had not even had rations served out to them. But every one's spirits were high ; scraps of song rolled down the platform, and suddenly a band began to bray out " Dixie "—

" Wish I was in the land of cotton,
Cinnamon tree and sandy bottom !
Look away ! Look away !
Look away down south to Dixie."

The music rang through the darkness, echoing in the empty sheds of the dépôt, as the men caught up the negro melody which had become the battle song of the Southern States—

" In Dixie land I'll take my stand,
To live and die for Dixie."

Lieutenant Zollicoffer loomed up out of the darkness close to Frank—

" Got all you want, son ? "

" Everything except my breakfast."

" Say, you ought to have five days' rations."

" I certainly haven't that. Nor has any one else that I can see."

" Some fool has been mussing things up. I'll see what I can do for you at the junction—there's no time here."

He bustled off, singing like every one else—

" Look away ! Look away ! Dixie Land ! "

Half an hour later Frank found himself with Coalbran and about forty others inside a freight car, which had been used for coal, judging by the coal-dust which grimed it. By leaving open the top flap of the door it was possible for a limited number to see out, and, at the present moment, hang out and shout " Dixie " at the pitch of their lungs to the drenched troops not yet entrained.

" Wish I was in the land of cotton,
Cinnamon tree and sandy bottom."

At last the train shook itself, strained, shivered, jolted—so that the packed men in the freight-cars lurched together, with whistles and cheery oaths. The engine began to pant in regular choking snores, and the long line of passenger-cars and freight-cars slowly glided out of the dépôt, while from every window, door and hatch, men leaned, waving their hats, shouting, and singing into the rainy darkness—

" Look away ! Look away ! Dixie Land ! "

§ 5

Frank never forgot his first experience of a troop train. At first it was not unpleasant. The men were in high spirits at the thought of action, and when they were too hoarse, and their throats too full of coal-dust to sing " Dixie " any more, they made bets as to where they were going, and how soon they would have the Union chawed up. Then packs of cards appeared, and the noise died down to a murmur of flushes and straights and right and left bowers, as poker and euchre were played under circumstances that would have discouraged any but the card-loving soldiers of the South.

The train went slowly, with continual stoppages, and it was some time before they reached the junction at Spartanburg. Here Zollicoffer fulfilled his promise to the

extent of a pound of crackers. Nothing else was to be had. The men shared the food, and half a dozen who had had rations served out to them before they left Columbia, divided them with the others. The word flew through the cars that they were bound for Corinth, in which case the journey ought not to take more than the day. But when night fell they were only eighteen miles beyond Spartanburg, stopped in the middle of the tracks.

It appeared that a part of the line was in the enemy's hands, and the train had to follow a roundabout route. During the night it ground and creaked at intervals along the rails, seldom going faster than ten miles an hour. At Greenville it was put into a siding and waited there long hours for a returning troop train, which, it afterwards turned out, had never started. Then on it crawled, through stiff mountainous country into Tennessee. The effort of reaching the next State apparently exhausted it, for the engine broke down, and the train had to wait in a windy gorge among the foothills while a new one was fetched from Tuxcumbia. And the morning and the evening was the third day.

Frank managed to doze during part of the time. The men took it in turns to sit down, as the car was too crowded for more than half to sit at once. He would generally contrive to lean against the wall or another man's back, and after a time would fall into a nodding half-sleep, in which events of the past mingled oddly with his present surroundings.

He would fancy that he sat in the great barn at Moon's Green, where the rafters sagged under the huge moulting roof of osier thatch, and that these grey bodies crowding round him were sheep—he could almost smell the rain on their fleeces. Or he was in the vault-roofed kitchen of Mockbeggar, full of rumbling wind ; he would hear a door close far away down the passage and footsteps approach, and he would tell himself that Maggie was coming as in the old days of his unspoken love, that he would sit beside her while she cooked the supper, and leave her, content at

having helped her to a pleasanter day—that his love was unconfessed, and Harman's rage, her shame, his exile, and all these strange military months, were but a dream : till the ache of his own cramped limbs awoke him, and he found himself in the stifling freight-car, crouched up among the legs of standing men, a queer unadventurous soldier of fortune, going to battle without thrill or fear.

Then he would take his turn at standing, and perhaps be able to lean out of the window and breathe the fragrant air of Southern April, full of strange wandering scents unfamiliar to his Kentish nostrils. The rain had cleared, and the rain-lilies were steeping the cleansed air in perfume, and there were fainter scents of sumach and cinnamon, of sage, and verbena, all smothered over with the thick odour of drenched and sprouting vegetation as the train clanked through the great solemn woods below the foothills. Sometimes the line cut through some wide plantation, fields of cotton and alfalfa—many lying fallow in this year of absent masters—and a white, verandahed house from whose portico perhaps a figure in muslin might wave to her defenders as they passed her, faint and sweating in the heat.

Frank felt no excitement when they stopped at Tuxcumbia and heard that they were sure to be at Corinth that night and on the Yankees next morning. He knew that in twenty-four hours he would probably be in that dread position—under fire for the first time. He had no idea how he would stand it, nor did he much care. He was not afraid of death, but he felt no longing for it—only a great indifference. Neither did he thrill with any particular enthusiasm for the cause he had so perversely championed ; he liked the men—the wild high spirits of some, the southern polish of others, the cheerfulness of all —but he expected that there were as good among the Yankees, whom they hated with all the perverted hatred of kin. As for their quarrel—he only imperfectly understood it. He was fighting beside them simply because he had lost his old life and had to find a new one, because he

wanted to be with Tom, because he wanted to forget Maggie. For these three reasons and no other he stood in that jolting, jostling freight-car, and between the heads of his comrades watched the sky first glow, then darken, over the woods of Tennessee.

§ 6

About midnight the train ran into Corinth. It was pitch dark, but warm ; and detraining was not so wretched as entraining had been, though it took as long. The dépôt was in darkness and Corinth itself nothing but a black lump with queer spectral eyes.

The men were desperately hungry, for even those who had had five days' rations served out to them had eaten them in three, after the manner of unseasoned troops, or had shared them with those who had nothing. A wooden measure full of parched corn was passed down the line just before they left the dépôt, and with a handful of this each man had to be content.

" Cheer up, kids," said Zollicoffer, munching his share. " See if you don't soon get some Yankee pork and beans."

" Where are we going ? " asked Frank.

" Up to the Tennessee River, I guess, and then across it—then across the Cumberland, and after that I'll be surprised if we ain't across the Ohio, flatting out the Buckeyes."

A puff of night-wind rustled down the tracks, bringing a drift of syringa from some balcony. A bugle sounded—then another. Words of command cracked out. The shapeless crowd of men became an army marching North.

Through the dark streets of Corinth the patient thud of feet went before the rumble of ordnance wheels. Ten thousand men were marching to reinforce General Polk at Pittsburg Landing. Gradually the noise of them ceased in the town, and throbbed out into the country.

As soon as they were on their legs again the men began to sing. With throats full of dust and corn-husk they bawled " Dixie," and other songs of the South : " Money

Musk," "S'wanee River," "Uncle Joe," "Adam never had no Mammy," with its shrieked refrain—

"Galernipper!
Mississippi!
O—hi—o!"

Some of them did not sing—they slept as they walked. Frank watched them; there were two of his line who marched as stoutly as the rest, yet whom he knew to be sleeping as horses sometimes sleep between the shafts. He himself felt stiff and cramped after his three days' journey, and his head was heavy, as if it would fall sideways if once he relaxed the effort of keeping it erect. But he could not sleep as he marched, for the rhythm of the march had a strange stirring effect upon his brain. The thud of feet was like a great pulse in the night, the drumming of some hidden heart in the body of the darkness. Perhaps it was the heart of the sleeping god who now dreamed of war as at other times he dreamed of love or pain or parting. And this devoted army which marched its ranks of youth and strength and life up to the shambles, was just the painful throbbing of a dream, which would pass and be as if it had never been.

The dawn began to break up the sky on the right of the marching army. Bluffs of pines were black against seas of fiery gold, and dribbles of yellow light filtered down into the valleys where the white-oaks and sumach grew. There was rain in the air, and soon it began to splash from the gold-spattered sky, calling out of the woods spring scents which were exotic to English nostrils—strange aromatic fragrances which it was hard to believe were part of the same revelation as the primroses of Wassall. . . .

The mud of the road had been churned into broth by the earlier troops of Polk and Beauregard. Their artillery had graven ruts in which Colonel Vander Horst's guns now floundered. The men's boots were heavy with mud, each oot was picked out of the sucking ground with an effort. The singing had ceased, and in its place was a new sound—the distant rumble and snore of guns.

" Sure, they've begun without us," said Zollicoffer, " but I guess they'll be glad to see us all the same."

The sound of the distant firing seemed to revive the men, some of whom had begun to drop out and straggle. This particular form of American independence was a sore trial to their officers and a shocking revelation to Tom Coalbran, but the enemy's guns never failed to rouse up those who would otherwise have thought nothing of stopping for rest or a meal or a drink. The rumble and snore grew louder —it became a rattle and boom. The echoes of the wooded hills roared with it, it thundered in the ravines. As the road wound upwards, the noise grew deafening, and when at last it reached a wooded plateau, to the thunder of the guns was joined the stutter of musketry with now and then the strange humming wail of a shell, flung from the Union batteries at Pittsburg Landing. Below in the valley the Tennessee River wound between its shaggy bluffs, and on it were little gunboats which from the distance looked like toy vessels. Their sides flashed and rumbled, as they flung shot into the woods where the trees and the men of the South were struck down together.

Frank felt only an infinite weariness. He had spent three days in a cramped and stuffy freight-car, he had marched twenty miles through the mud, he had had no sleep for three nights and nothing to eat except some parched corn and a few crackers. His one desire now was for sleep. His head was heavy with it, his limbs ached with it, and when life and death were at last before him, splitting the air, smashing the woods, and shaking the ground, all he could think of and long for was sleep. He was conscious the whole time that he ought to be feeling thrilled, at least afraid, but now that the thud of marching feet had died away as the troops halted, the faint excitement which had responded to it had also died. He almost fancied that when the great heart of the sleeping war-god ceased to beat his own became silent too, and he now stood like a dead man in the woods—a dead man unnatural, upright, without grave or burial.

They had halted beside a little creek, and in the brief gasping silences of the battle, he could hear it murmuring as it slipped along. The birds were singing too, for the dawn had come, cool, golden and rainy. In an oak near by Frank saw a blue-bird preening its pink breast, while the Bob-White called from the cane-brakes, and kingfishers swung and darted along the creek. Somehow the creek was much more real to him than the soldiers and the guns, than the fire-spitting woods and the Tennessee River with its little toy gunboats. Long after the battle was lost and won, and the guns were silent and the soldiers either marched away or left behind under the ground, little Owls Creek would flow and ripple on, murmur, and catch the sunlight, bubble round a dipping branch, and eddy with the movements of darting water-rats. It alone was real. It formed no part of that red dream of a sleeping god, whose heart was the tread of a marching army and whose snore was the rumble of Parrott guns. . . .

Suddenly the air split, screamed, roared, the earth rose up in a sheet of flame, and then came a blackness, which rubbed the eyes, choked the nostrils with an evil, nitrous smell, and put a horrible chemico-charnel taste on the lips. A shell had burst within thirty yards of the waiting troops. Frank, who was at the far end of the line, felt the air rush round him and the smoke belch and settle. His head swam, and for a moment it seemed as if the explosion had taken place inside his head and that it had burst with the noise. Then an indescribable coldness came over him, and a weakness—his legs turned suddenly to cotton-wool, and at the same time his gorge rose with physical nausea. He knew that he was going to run away as soon as he could get his paralysed limbs to move, but for the moment he could not stir. Then suddenly the darkness lifted, whether in fact or merely from his shocked and clouded brain he could not tell. He saw two boys in the line before him turn round, twitching, livid, with their eyes starting out. He saw that they were going to run away, but as they looked at him their faces altered, the terror passed, and they shuffled back to

their places. He realised with an inward laugh that it was his stout and fearless behaviour which had reassured them and checked their flight.

The men were ordered to lie down. One or two were lying down already, and these were carried to the rear. Frank was glad to bury his face in the soft leaf-mast with which the ground was thick. His terror had not bitten deep into his sleep-sick brain, and now it slowly turned into thankfulness that at last he could lie still and shut his eyes. For some time his body twitched and shuddered, responding to unconscious stimuli, but his mind was at rest, smothered in the deep sleep of utter physical and mental exhaustion.

He lay with his head on his haversack, his arms spread out on either side of him like a cross, but limp and straggled like the whole of him, as he lay a little twisted on his side, with an unconscious nestling into the brown spring earth, which held him here in far-off Tennessee as it had held him in the Isle of Oxney, when, tired, he threw himself down upon it. And though the spring scents in the air were foreign, the ultimate, close scent of the earth was the same as at home—soil, leaf-mould and violets . . . perhaps it was this homely fragrance which kept him asleep through all the confused noises of the battle, the scream and burst of shells—though none again so near—the crash of falling trees, the thump and roar of the Union Parrotts and Columbiads, the shout of advancing troops, the mutterings and curses of his own companions, some of whom wanted to advance, some to retire, and all to have their breakfast.

The men were kept lying there on their stomachs in the wood till the desire for breakfast became the desire for dinner, and at last the desire for dinner the desire for supper. Now and then a despatch-rider galloped past, or a shell fell near enough to send a rain of torn boughs and leaves, mixed with earth, and occasionally human rags, over the prostrate troops. But the advance was not sounded yet. Some of the men fell asleep like Frank, some began to chew grass and leaves, some lost their nerve, and cowered against the

ground weeping and vomiting. As a matter of fact thy were not dangerously exposed. The position of the reserve was unknown to the Yankees, whose shells seldom fell nearer than two hundred yards, where the road to Corinth ran through the woods. After a time even cards appeared, and euchre and poker flourished in the leaf-mast as they had flourished in the coal-dust.

Once or twice Frank woke, heard the bubble of the creek and the banging of the guns, heard his comrades mumble of cold decks and suckers, and then nestled down to the earth again, remembering that he was in the midst of something he wished to forget.

At last the guns began to rumble more slowly, there were fewer explosions and crashes in the wood. The battle was dying down, and it seemed as if it would be over without the 14th South Carolina taking part in it. Then suddenly the bugle sounded the advance. Sleeping men awoke, gaming men hurriedly stowed their cards away, shuddering men gained courage from the prospect of action. In a second they were all on their feet, and in another advancing at the double. Frank's sleepiness and weariness were gone, he felt strangely exalted as he ran among the tree trunks in the filtering afternoon sunshine. Zollicoffer ran ahead, and as the men advanced, they began to shout—"Yay! Yay-ay-ay! Yay-ay-ay-ay!"

It was like a wonderful and delightful game. Frank grasped his musket—of Belgian make—and shouted "Yay-ay!" with the others. He saw Coalbran also running and shouting, and there was a little smear of blood on his cheek, as if he had been grazed by something.

They came to the edge of the bluff, and the trees fell away, for the whole bluff had been stripped of its forest as if by a storm. Those trees which had not been cut down for abattis had been thrown down by gun-fire from the river. Trunks rose from which the boughs had been stripped, and the ground was thick with torn branches, stumps, splinters, trunks, so that it was impossible to run any more. The river had disappeared, smudged out by

smoke ; drifts of black, stinking smoke rolled away against the bluffs, and in a parting of them Shiloh Church stood clear, with the flames running out from under its roof. The enemy had vanished like the river, though here and there a blue coat could be seen amongst the grey on the ground. A little further on there were more blue than grey. Dead and wounded men lay thrown about in all sorts of grotesque, muddled attitudes, like broken tin soldiers thrown away by a careless child. Sometimes a Yankee and a Dixie man lay in each other's arms, whether because they had perished locked in deadly fight, or remembered at the last moment that they were brothers, no one could tell. Frank scarcely noticed them, he trod on them with pretty much the same half-regretful feeling as he had occasionally trodden on graves in Wittersham Churchyard.

Masses of Confederate soldiers now appeared, shouting. Some shouted " General Beauregard's killed ! " , others shouted " No—it's General Bragg ! " and others " It's Johnston ! " It proved in the end to be Johnston. They all scrambled down to the river in a mass ; the Yankees had fled, the Tennessee and Mississippi regiments had " given them Ball's Bluff " before the Carolinas arrived. All their camps save one had fallen into Confederate hands, and suddenly a great cry went up of " Kitchen ! "

" Kitchen ! Kitchen ! " shouted the hungry men, who had not eaten for two days.

In vain their officers tried to restrain them, to urge them on to pursue the Yankees across the river, to drive the Union out of Tennessee. They were merely swept along on the tide of ragged, starving soldiers, who with shouts of " Kitchen ! " and " Yay ! Yay ! " flung themselves on the commissariat of the enemy.

§ 7

Frank was disappointed with his first battle. It had begun with sleeping and ended with eating, and though

at the time he felt he would rather have his teeth in a Yankee's corned beef ration than his bullet in his head, for some days he felt ashamed of his unwarlike conduct. At least he might have kept awake. . . .

During the night the troops bivouacked in the woods, which were full of prowling Federals. Owing to his having slept most of the day, Frank was unable to sleep at night, and the fears which exhaustion had driven off returned to show him that he was but common clay. Though he had not been afraid when he lay in the leaf-mould, close to the road where the shells were bursting, he was horribly afraid as he sat that night by the camp-fire, listening to the shots that popped and rattled in the cane-brakes. It was now his turn to shudder and vomit, while the men who had shuddered and vomited at the proper time despised him.

Zollicoffer gave him a kindly word now and then. He was busy at the head of a gang which hunted for wounded among the woods. Towards dawn Frank pulled himself together and offered himself as a volunteer. Many an officer would have refused him, as he stood there with his white pinched face, and the froth of his retching on his lips. But Zollicoffer merely said "Bully for you," and Frank went to grope in the scarred and shattered woods for wounded Dixiemen.

It was mysterious work—padding about in the darkness, chasing after muffled half-sounds, which as often as not resolved themselves into the scurrying of some animal. Strange cold lights dipped into the trees from the dawn, and sometimes the glare of a Union camp-fire shone among the white-oaks. It was dangerous work, too, for the flag of truce was often invisible in the thickets and Yankee rifles spat with deadly aim. But Frank found himself soothed by it, cleansed of his fear by the peace of the wounded forest and the courage of the wounded men. They found those who had lain long dragging hours in the sassafras thickets, where the leaf-mould was soggy with their blood, and the thorns fluttered tiny flags of tattered

Confederate grey. They found many whose faces were as grey as their coats, whose limbs were stiff as the boughs of the shattered trees, and whose rigid hands could hardly be made to surrender the poor weapon they had wielded against the smart modern arms of Illinois or Indiana. Many of the dead looked extraordinarily peaceful, as if they had been glad to give their country the sacrament of their body and blood—and those whose faces were convulsed with fear or agony gave oddly the impression that the contortion was a lapse, that they had been caught in their horror unawares, and would have died calm, and even smiling, like the others had they been allowed one second more.

When the dawn brimmed over the eastern bluffs of the Tennessee River, the Union guns began to pound again. Frank was now himself, and able to take his place in the ranks, purged, by fear, of indifference. He wanted during the new day's battle to make up for his slumber by Owls Creek, for his wolfing of the enemy's rations. But he was not given his chance of atonement. It was known to the Confederate generals that reinforcements had reached the Federals during the night, and they soon saw that their exhausted men could not stand against the fresh troops Buell had brought up from Memphis. To prolong the battle might lose them the advantage they had gained —as things were, the Yankees, advancing under General Nelson, had recaptured several of the guns and colours lost the day before. So the retreat was sounded, and the battle of Shiloh, or Pittsburg Landing, ended like most battles of the Civil War—indecisively. The Confederates had undoubtedly been victorious on the first day, but they were unable to hold what they had won, and were obliged to abandon the fight just when its continuation might indeed have given the enemy Ball's Bluff—which, being interpreted, means driven them roaring back to Washington.

The Dixiemen marched back to Corinth as they had marched from it—in the rain.

§ 8

"Lebanon,
"Tennessee, C.S.A.,
"14/6/62.

"DEAR MR. BELLACK,

"I have not heard from you—I suppose it was rash to expect it in this country of confusion—but I feel I must write again. I want to know there is one link between me and the old land and the old days, otherwise I almost think I should forget I ever was an Englishman who ploughed the fields of Kent. Not that the new life is more interesting than the old, but one simply has not time to think of anything—I mean, when my mind is not too busy it is too tired to think. Tom was right when he recommended soldiering as a cure for love—one soon ceases to worry very much about anything except one's rations and one's doss. Why even on the occasion of my first battle—I fought at Shiloh, a comparatively unimportant engagement which may not have found its way into your newspaper—I spent most of the time asleep. I was worn out after three days in a freight-car, followed by an all-night march, and as the 14th South Carolina was not called up till the end of the day I slumbered blissfully within two hundred yards of a road which the Yankees were pounding with their Columbiads. At first I was furious with myself, but now I am more philosophical, and realise that if I had not gone to sleep I should probably have run away. I flunked out, as they say here, during the night, and was a ghastly object, sick with mortal fear. If Zollicoffer had not been good fellow enough to trust me and let me join a party searching for the wounded, and so pull myself together a bit, I don't know what would have become of me. However, that's over and done with, and I expect when I'm under fire again I shall behave more rationally.

"We are at present at Lebanon, and very quiet. We returned to Corinth after our two days' trip to Pittsburg Landing, but did not stay there long, as the Yankees had

chawed up the Ohio and Mobile Railway. This is a wonderful country for forests. I laugh when I think what a lot we used to make of Mopesden Wood, or Iden Wood over in Sussex. We'd call them thickets or shrubberies here. The forests spread not for miles, but for hundreds of miles—mostly white-oak and cypress, with thickets of laurel and sassafras, and an undergrowth of creeper, sumach, Indian-pipe and bittersweet, so thick and matted that sometimes you have to chop through it with an axe. If you get through the leaf-mould and cypress-needles and turn up the soil beneath, you find it coal-black—you could grow three crops a year there (they say the alfalfa yields six). If only we had a few wagon-loads of it over the Rother snape! Out here it lies fallow—wasted. There are some large plantations in the neighbourhood, but very little is being done on them this year, as nearly all the men are away. It is a shame. After the war I feel I should like to settle down here and reclaim part of the forest. I ache to have my tools into soil like this.

"I see I am already talking of 'after the war,' but at present one can hardly picture an ending. I cannot think of such a bobtail army as ours ever marching into Washington, and neither can I think of the Yankees, in spite of their superiority in numbers and equipment, marching over the men of the South into Richmond. There is a dauntless spirit among us here, and you can scarcely imagine the hardships that the men of the South, and the women too, have endured for the love of Dixie. If the Yankees have the advantage in men, guns and money, we have the advantage in courage, fortitude and enterprise. We also have the better generals. If we had not, we should have been wiped out long ago. When you think of those splendid troops poured out by the hundred thousand from rich and crowded Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Illinois, etc., against the poor and empty Carolinas, Virginia, Louisiana, Tennessee—it is only by comparing Lee with McLellan, Jackson with Hooker, Beauregard and Polk with Grant and Sherman that you

account for our survival. We have been splendidly led, and we have splendidly followed.

" But we shall not win this war. I say it in all sobriety, and in spite of what I said just now about being unable to picture our defeat. We cannot win, for we are fighting against steadily growing odds. They must increase while we must decrease. Already every available man in the South is fighting under our colours, and yet our numbers fall short of theirs, and they still have countless reserves to draw upon. We have no credit—our paper money is practically valueless, and it is only the patriotism and devotion of all which makes any sort of exchange possible —our arms, in spite of the new foundries we have set up, and the quickness of American resource and invention, are inferior both in make and numbers to those of the Union. We are cut off from the outer world—the blockade is tightening—only our endurance stands between us and defeat.

" Note that we generally win our battles. The Yankees ' flunk out ' far easier than we do, but we are not strong enough to turn our victories to much account. Our troops are far too exhausted even to hold their winnings, still less follow them up. The Yankees run till they are tired, then stop and reassemble. Meantime we have spilled our blood in a battle which the newspapers afterwards report as ' indecisive.' So it happened at Shiloh, so it happened, I believe, throughout the campaign in Virginia—our numbers could not hold what our valour won. That is why I feel we shall lose in the end, though I also feel that will not be till the last bullet is fired from the last gun by the last man in Dixie.

" You will exclaim that I have become a keen Confederate, that I am no longer the indifferent, slightly superior Englishman who took up arms in a foreign cause because no one wanted him in his own country. Perhaps you are right—I certainly feel very different now from when I first came out. Then I would, if Tom had preferred it, have taken up arms for the Union. Now nothing would

make me leave the Stars and Bars for Old Glory. My torpor has been stripped off me by my own hardships and by the continual witness of others' self-sacrifice. Also my eyes have been opened to a side of this war which was hidden from me at home. Then I looked on it as a slave war, or at best a political one; now I see that the issues are far bigger—that they are universal. This American war of secession is the inevitable clash between the free, pastoral South and the hard-headed, business-minded, money-making North. It is part of a fight which is being waged throughout the world—the fight between agriculture and commerce, manhood and machinery, nature and civilisation. I am on the side of nature and agriculture, though I know that civilisation and commerce will win, because they have more resources. The North wins throughout the world—but thank God I am fighting on the side of the South, for it is the side of nature and freedom and beauty.

"How I run on! You will be tired of me—if indeed you ever get this letter. For perhaps I shall not send it, and if I do, it may not reach you. I think I must be getting literary again, for I now often feel an itch to write, and this letter is a potsherd for me to scrape myself withal. I hope soon to hear from you—with news of all at home. I still call it home, you notice, though of course it is not my home. Please tell me about Maggie. I feel now that I have strength to know. That part of me which shouted and kicked such a lot is dead. I take it that Maggie is happy—and I'm glad and thankful. I was an ass to dream about her as I did.

"Tell the Coalbrans that Tom is now a sergeant, and actually walking out with one of the daughters of Lebanon. How the romance began I cannot tell you, for he is very hazy himself, but every afternoon he is off duty they walk solemnly up the main street arm in arm, in the shade of the cotton-wood trees. Her name is Samantha Jones—tell her prospective relations-in-law—and her father keeps a high-class saloon. They talk of getting married when

the war is over—but read what I have already said on that subject. Dear old Tom! I'm afraid I don't see much of him under these new circumstances, and find him very boring when I do, but his empty place is filled with work and Pete Zollicoffer, who promises to take me home with him some day on furlough. Furloughs are most lavishly given here, because if not given they are taken.

"Well, good-bye, sir. They're after me to chop firewood.

"Yours in rags and sincerity,

"F. R."

§ 9

Any chances of news from home were badly damaged by the continual movements of Polk's army, which soon afterwards left Lebanon and marched on Bardstown in Kentucky. It had long been part of the Southern objective to rouse the neutral State of Kentucky to the support of the other slave States, but so far little had happened beyond the devastation of a fruitful country and the useless sacrifice of gallant boys.

Frank went under fire again in a brief, cracking skirmish at Perryville, and had the satisfaction of behaving like any ordinary soldier. He was mortally frightened when he had time to think, but he did not have much of that. He shot a Union man at close range, and took two prisoners —who were afterwards paroled, the Confederates having nowhere to keep them and nothing to feed them on, but not until they had been forced to surrender their dandy equipment of arms, greatcoats, blankets, and new boots. It was the boast of Colonel Brandywine that all his men wore Union greatcoats.

The summer and autumn did much to wear out the boots and emphasise the value of the coats and blankets, as the 14th South Carolina march and countermarched in Kentucky, and at last found themselves back in Tennessee, storming the defences of Corinth behind which they had stood not long ago. That was a glorious day, when

the Stars and Stripes and the Stars and Bars swayed together on the redoubts, when an Ohio regiment stood still in dumfounded admiration of the advancing South. But in the end Dixie's men were driven back across the marshes and lagoons, and then through the cypress woods to Murfreesboro, where General Braxton Bragg had his winter quarters.

Here Frank spent his second Christmas away from England. The townsfolk were hospitable, and dined their soldier guests extravagantly on skinny geese and hot corn-pone, washed down with cobbler. The valiant pale women of the South, in the worn muslins of their poverty, sang "Lorena," "Maryland," and "Money Musk," or, with their guitars across their knees, gave the negro melodies which their men-folk sang on the march. Oddly enough Frank had never felt so much a stranger as when among the women of his adopted country. His experience of women had been limited, and these were a type he had never met or even pictured—beautiful and exotic as Rita Simons, but without her vividness or her voluptuousness; simple and fresh as Maggie Coalbran, and yet somehow imperious in their shyness. He sat before them abashed, drew back if their delicate garments rubbed against his dirty, ragged uniform, was abnormally conscious of his big feet, in spite of the hard-won Union boots, and felt uncomfortably near tears at their singing.

"Sure, you don't hitch with women," said Zollicoffer on their way back to the cantonments; "don't you like them?"

"I've met very few—I'm not used to them."

"And you're not a boy, neither. Don't they grow women in your country?"

"Plenty. But for me there have always been one or two women that have shut out the rest."

Zollicoffer was interested, but Frank did not feel inclined to go further in confidence.

"Well," said the lieutenant, "perhaps some day I'll take you to see my cousins—and I tell you they're fine.

There's Madge and Isabelle in Mississippi, Blanche and Adela in Virginia, and Lorena in Georgia. I should like you to meet them all. It isn't natural for a likely chap like you to sit mum and shy among a lot of dandy girls."

Frank thanked him for the offer of his female relations, but secretly hoped that it would not materialise. After all, though he had loved one woman very truly and another very madly, he was not a woman's man. He had not yet tired of the all-male society which had been his ever since he left England, and whereas most of his comrades in arms grabbed eagerly at any stray petticoat which fluttered across their path—even Tom had reacted from the prevalent masculinity—he had made no effort to know the women of the various towns he had visited. He liked male roughness and openness, the breadth, the strength, the naïve coarseness of his own sex; womanhood stood, in his experience, for mystery and miscalculation, he preferred the more reliable obtuseness of the male. Though his heart still ached for one woman, woman in general had little or no place in his thoughts or in his life.

Nevertheless, he wished he had not heard those women sing. . . .

§ 10

Four days later the Federals, under Rosecrans, were outside Murfreesboro. On the morning after Christmas, General Bragg had received news of their advance from Nashville. They had marched slowly through the hilly and densely wooded country, so Bragg had time to choose his ground and concentrate his troops. General Polk's corp was on the left bank of the Stone River, close to the Nashville pike. It was a bitterly cold day. There was a flush of snow on the Nashville pike, and the blackish green of the cypress woods was daubed with glistening white patches, while lumps and cakes of snow drooped the branches, and walloped suddenly on to the backs of troops beneath.

On the morning of the 31st the battle started character-

istically by the Confederate left wing hurling themselves upon the Federal right and devouring their breakfasts. The Yankees were driven back in great confusion, guns were captured before they could be limbered up, and the camp with the commissariat and quantities of baggage fell into the hands of the victorious and hungry South. Then Davis's division was sent plunging through the cane-brakes to illustrate the message which Rosecrans had just received from his aides-de-camp—that the enemy had advanced and driven back his right wing. Sheridan's division alone stood firm, supported by Rousseau's artillery, which, from some rising ground above the woods, poured shot and canister down on Polk's corps as they advanced against Sheridan.

It was like Shiloh—with the roaring, splitting woods; though here the ravaged trees were not oaks, but cypress, as if they had been planted in solemn aforethought to deck this graveyard of young Americans. In the green tunnelled darkness the snow gleamed in odd patches and smears of light—till it was too fouled and blood-stained to glisten any more. The woods were full of confusion, for in those dim cane-brakes it was impossible to distinguish friend or foe. Union blue and Confederate grey looked pretty much alike in that dusk. Once Frank narrowly missed being shot by a corporal of a Louisiana regiment, who came whooping down on him; on another occasion he mixed with some smudgy figures that in an open ride suddenly became a detached fragment of the 19th Minnesota, to whom he showed a good pair of heels.

Polk's corps were being very wickedly punished by the Union guns, which fired on them from the heights, as again and again they threw themselves upon stout-standing Sheridan. A grey tide of men surged and eddied among the tree-trunks, broke against the hill-side, ebbed back, leaving its jetsam of dead and wounded on the slope, and then swept forward again, reaching a higher water-mark on the scarred hill, then ebbed, exhausted. The blue

twinkling December sky was now all smeared and grimed with drifting powder-smoke, the snow was a dabbled mass of slush and blood, and the cypresses were stripped and torn as if by a whirlwind ; their snapped trunks ended in grotesque tassels of splinters, their ripped boughs whizzed through the air, to maim and kill more than one man whom the guns had spared.

Frank scarcely noticed the comrades who fell all round him. A boy whom he knew and liked, a big red-cheeked farm-lad from Arkansas post, suddenly doubled up as he ran, and fell across Rainger's way, coughing his life out of his shattered lungs. Frank was careful not to step on him, but again a man's—and this time a living man's—sacrificed body was no more to him than the half-reverenced graves in Wittersham Churchyard. He never thought of being hit himself, though he could hear the mosquito whine of the bullets all round him, and suddenly one went through his hat, knocking it off, and the next minute another came through his hair, parting the thick red thatch like a gust of wind. He laughed, and pounded on up the hill. Though it was bitterly cold, and his coat had long ago been torn off in the woods, his skin burned, and his body poured with sweat. As he ran he shouted with his fellow-soldiers : " Yay-ay-ay ! Yay-ay-ay ! " He saw the Stars and Bars and the blue-and-white Palmetto Flag of South Carolina sweep up the hill before him, streaming their tatters in the smoky wind—till at last they stood against the sky, shredded, riddled, rent to ribbons, mere bunches of dirty rag upon their staffs, but triumphant, declaring to the surging regiments behind, and the scattering regiments in front, to General Bragg on Trapper's Knob in the midst of the wood, and General Rosecrans a-horseback on the Salem pike, that Polk's men had at last broken Sheridan's line, and driven him headlong from the hill like a spilt sack of grain.

Withers's division of Polk's corps plunged down the hill after Sheridan's fugitives, while Chatham's division stayed behind to dig entrenchments, construct abattis

and generally fortify their position against any possible counter-attack. The whole time they were partly exposed to the fire of Rousseau's batteries on the north-west, and an hour later there was a sudden roar of guns from the north-east, beyond the Stone River. No Yankee troops were believed to have crossed the river, and it seemed fairly obvious to the men on the hill that they were being shelled by their own comrades—the tragedy of Wilson's Creek, Seven Pines, Philippi, and half a dozen other battles, was being repeated in all its savage irony.

Staff officers were at once sent off to find out if the fire came deliberately from Federals or mistakenly from the Confederates. But no one succeeded in reaching the Stone River. Meantime the men hesitated to bring into action their own guns—Vander Horst's artillery, which had just been dragged up the hill. The shells burst among them murderously as they sought refuge in their half-dug trenches. Their courage, which had never faltered in the face of the enemy, showed signs of collapse before this treachery of fate, and their officers saw that in a few minutes they would be down the hill again, and Sheridan's Massachusetts and Connecticut boys back in their old position, which had in the interval been substantially strengthened by their foes.

"Say," said Peter Zollicoffer, striving to reassure his men, "we didn't build these rifle-pits for the Yanks. I reckon they'll be blamed well pleased when they come back and find the cute little place we've fixed up for them here. Stand steady, kids, and even if you're bust by one of our own shells, it'll be dying for Dixie just the same."

"It's all very well, boss," grumbled a sugar-planter from Vermillionville, "but there ain't such a gol-durned lot of us that we can afford to be chawed up by each other. I guess it'll be best for Dixie if we mizzle."

It was at that moment that the only possible thing to do was done. Three sergeant colour-bearers stepped forward from the line, each displaying the colours of his

regiment—Sergeant Oakley of the 4th Tennessee, Sergeant Hooks of the 9th Tennessee, and Sergeant Coalbran of the 14th South Carolina. The powder-fumes had sunk from the hill, drifting round it over the woods below, and in the twinkling air of the hill-top they and their colours must be clearly visible to the unknown battery thumping away beyond the Stone River. For ten minutes they stood there erect, the war-soiled flags of South Carolina and Tennessee flapping their rags above them, while the troops behind waited eagerly for the ravaging fire to cease.

It did not cease; it doubled its fury. Those guns were Uncle Sam's after all. Orders were at once given to Colonel Vander Horst's guns to reply, and the men in the trenches shouted to the sergeants to come back. The two Tennessee men were soon safe and unhurt in their positions, but a few paces from the line the colours of the Palmetto State suddenly dipped and fell. Tom Coalbran and his flag lay rolled together in a tattered and blood-stained bundle, that for a moment or two flapped and heaved and arched itself grotesquely in the slush, and then lay divinely still.

§ 11

That night, the last of the old year, Frank helped to lay Tom Coalbran in the frozen earth. The guns ceased at sunset, when crimson lights began to move and dip over the woods and trick the gunners' eyes. By that time the battery on the hill had silenced the battery by the Stone River. The entrenchments and abattis were finished, and the weary men turned to their last task of burying the dead.

The earth was stiff under its scab of frozen slush, and it was some hours before the big grave was ready. There was no parson to read the Burial Service—only a devout planter from the Tallahatchie, who offered up a few prayers, kneeling on the ice. The men were tired and

listless, and when their job was done lay down beside the braziers which glowed in the cypress caves, and fell asleep. One less sleepy and more sentimental than the others sat up for a little while hacking at a clumsy wooden cross which he said he would set up over the grave next morning, but at the end of an hour he had tumbled snoring across his rood.

Frank was on sentry-go, near the top of the hill. He did not repine, though it was freezing hard, and his limbs ached with cold and exhaustion. He knew that he could not have slept with his mind full of the thought of Tom lying wrapped in his torn Palmetto flag in his big promiscuous grave. Tom was dead, his faithful simple friend, the one survival of his native fields in this huge convulsed America. While Tom had lived, one tiny pulse of England had beat in his heart, now nothing of England was left—with Tom, England had died. That handful of Kentish dust would mix with the dust of Tennessee, and from it a Murfreesboro cypress would grow up into the black wood. A cypress would grow out of Tom's heart instead of the grass and daisies of Wittersham Churchyard. Frank laughed—from Tom's heart should have grown grass for sheep to browse or an apple tree for horses to nibble.

Far away he heard the chimes of Murfreesboro, ringing the New Year into all that desolation. The great woods were in silence, save for the hiss and rustle of the breeze over the cypresses. The battle had died away, and the men who a few hours ago had surged among the cane-brakes had now shrunk into clots round the braziers. The Federals had vanished too. Frank stood alone on the hill-side, seeing the New Year in at Murfreesboro.

He looked at the stars gleaming and flashing on the inky zenith. Even they were strange—the old signs, familiar to the age-long memories of his race, had dipped behind the Northern hills, and in their place were new stars—Canopus, the Centaur, and the glistening Poop o Argo. The stranger must even look up to a strange

heaven. He thought of the Isle of Oxney, as he had often seen it, coming home from Iden or the Fivewatering, its black lump outlined against the shining Polar Crown, with the Plough a-swing close by, and the great square of Pegasus, and Cassiopeia, and all those dear familiar constellations which now lay swallowed up in the black pit of the North. Then he thought again of Tom lying wrapped in the strange flag he had died for, among strange men, in a strange grave, under a strange heaven. . . . But not in a strange earth ; the earth alone, among all this strangeness, was the same, the unchanging earth. There might be different men and different stars, but the earth was the earth that Tom had served and loved, even though it brought forth sugar and cotton instead of poor stalks and stubs of oats. Tom lay as safe and friendly in it, here in Tennessee, as he could have lain at home. And after all in this new country he had found adventure and romance, such as he had never found at home, and taken them still fresh and unspoiled into the kindliness of sleep. Surely he rested well.

§ 12

The next day the exhausted troops rested on their arms. Neither side had strength to resume the battle. The day after that the little knot of troops on Three Sergeants' Hill —as it had already been named—were ordered to abandon the ground they had won at the price of so much blood. A day later the general retreat sounded and the whole Confederate army marched out of Murfreesboro.

It was heartbreaking. Once again a victory had been bought and paid for by the Southern army, once again it had been forced to leave its dear purchase unclaimed. In spite of the captured colours, guns, prisoners and baggage, it seemed to Frank a defeated army that wound its way through the chasms and bluffs south of Murfreesboro. The men sang as usual, and were in high spirits, as once again the capture of the Federal kitchens had given them

an unaccustomed supply of food. They had a song which began—

"Pork and beans! Pork and beans!—
We've won the battle of Pork and Beans!
Hoosiers, Hawkeyes, and Johnny Cakes,
As soon as they saw us cried: 'Great Snakes!
Let's all run off to Washington,
And tell of the victory we've won.'
So off they ran, and ran, and ran,
And ran, and Ran, and Ran, and RAN—
And left behind for the Dixie man
Pork and beans! Pork and beans!
We've won the battle of Pork and Beans."

The army of Tennessee retreated to a position fifty miles south of Murfreesboro, behind the Duck River. Here followed some weeks of comparative quiet, while the two armies of Rosecrans and Braxton Bragg faced each other across the swamps, never coming to grips, but watching each other stealthily like cats crouching for a spring. Frank was stationed in Roper's City, a small village about the size of Wittersham, when, for the first time in his fifteen months of exile, he had a letter from home.

It was put into his hands all tattered with its wanderings. for it had been in the country three months. Mr. Bellack's rather sharp, old-maidish handwriting was hardly decipherable on the envelope, where Queen Victoria's stamp and the Tenterden postmark was little more than smudge.

Frank's hands shook a little as he tore it open. It was an irony that his first letter should arrive now—when Tom was far away in the cypress-woods of Murfreesboro, in his refuge of friendly earth. How eagerly he would have gulped down the news of home, the doings of the Isle of Oxney and Moon's Green. Mr. Bellack sent him many kind messages, and much barnyard news—Pudding had safely foaled, and Alice and Poppy had fetched twenty pounds each at Tenterden Market. Dave Coalbran was thinking of draining the water meadows down by Ethnam. Dave's Eliza was in the family way. Mrs. Coalbran had had the ague that spring, and was still feeling very poorly. Cooper of Kitchenhour had just married for the second time. . . . There was

something faintly grotesque about the letter, as if a man should solemnly sit down and chronicle the happenings of a dream ; for it was all a dream, that life in the Isle of Oxney, he knew it now, as he read Mr. Bellack's dream-record. Nothing had ever happened there—he, Frank Rainger, had never been anything but a dirty bobtail soldier of fortune, fighting in Tennessee.

That same dream-like haze hung even over the Parson's news of Maggie. With no more emotion than he would have read an account of a dream, Frank read that Maggie was again to be a mother, that she was now living very quietly and happily with her husband, and Frank had done her his truest service when he left her.

"They seem to have shaken down very comfortably together. Of course they are not ideally matched, and he is really too old for her, but I think he understands her in his queer, rough way. She made a mistake when she married him, but it is a mistake she has been allowed to repair and live down. They will be Darby and Joan in another five years."

Frank stood creasing the letter and frowning. So it was all a dream, that burning fiery furnace he had walked through for her sake, and all his love and self-oblation, all his mistakes and despairs, all were equally the dim smoke of dreams, the mist that lies so thick at night upon the hill, and at daylight is gone, not to be seen again. And who was he who stumbled through these dreams, the lost traveller on this misty hill ? Was he himself part of the dream, part of the mist that passes and fades away ?—or was he the Dreamer, safe and at rest, troubled only for a few brief moments between two sleeps ? . . .

§ 13

General Bragg had not been long on the line of the Duck River when he began to have repeated requests for reinforcements from General Pemberton, in command of the army of

Mississippi. For some time now Pemberton had been struggling with Grant in the swamps and jungles that edged the great river, and was being slowly pushed back on Vicksburg, the fall of which meant the end of the Mississippi campaign. Ever since the capture of New Orleans, a year ago, the Yankees had been grabbing their way up the river, and Pemberton's men were exhausted with their long skirmishing in the malarious swamps—while the Federal gunboats steamed up the creeks and boyous burning and ravaging the plantations, sacking the "cities," damming streams and flooding fruitful lands, so that the rich country of the Mississippi was fast becoming a desert of charred forests and drowned cotton-fields.

At first Bragg refused Pemberton's requests—it was all he could do to hold his own in Tennessee; but as in time the requests became entreaties, and he realised the catastrophe which the loss of Vicksburg, and with it the whole length of the river, would be to the South, he began to dribble out detachments to Mississippi. That was how in the April of '63, a year after his first blooding at Shiloh, Frank Rainger found himself, with the 14th Carolina and an Alabama regiment, detached from Polk's corps, and sent to reinforce Pemberton at Grand Gulf.

They went by train as far as Raymond, and then came a long march through the forests of the Mississippi Valley. He was now in a new country, almost tropical in its tangled bush. Cypress, sycamore, cinnamon and cotton-wood trees were draped with greenish-grey pendules of Spanish moss, hoary and majestic like the beards of ancient kings. The wild vine wreathed in and out of the cane-brakes, and the Indian-pipe hung waxy in the tunnels of the undergrowth. The hot spring sunlight was filtered to a gentle green before it reached the foreheads of the Dixie men; but from the damp black earth under their feet steamed up a choking miasma, the sick smell of moist and rotting vegetation, so that the sweat dripped from their skins in spite of the roofed-out sun.

At intervals the woods would slip away, and a great

swamp spread itself in reeds and water, all rough with knotted sedges and wild rice. Here the bobolink blurted out his little song, and the frogs croaked and sawed, and the mocking-bird cried, " Kerplop ! kerplop ! " as the grey troops went up to their knees in the mud and water. When they came nearer the seat of war, the woods were full of charred patches, and now and then they met little creeping fires which had to be stamped out. The charred places grew larger—they smelled horrible, and there was something *macabre* in the black rags of moss which still hung from the big trees. The men's mouths grew straight and their eyes grew stern when they saw what Michigan had done to Mississippi. Once they passed through a burnt plantation —the house a mere crumble of black ruins, its elegant furniture in a broken heap before it, pulled out on the lawn and there wantonly smashed to pieces, its cotton-gins destroyed, its population of workers either driven or carried away—nothing left but a few dead mules and oxen lying stiff-legged on the trampled grass. The men growled curses under their breath as they marched by.

" I wonder what's become of my cousins Beaumont at Yazoo City," said Zollicoffer. " Have they been blenkered up like this ? Those were the girls I wanted you to meet, Rainger. I wonder where they are. I believe the Yanks have been all over the Yazoo—God darn 'em ! "

" The Yankees are enrolling niggers to fight for them, aren't they ? This looks like nigger work."

" Sure. But John Brown's army can do without any help—I saw Holy Springs after it had been through—no darkies there, and yet the whole place mussed up to nothing and drunk up dry."

" Is it a fact that throughout this war there has been hardly a single case of outrage on a woman ? "

" M'yes. The Yankees are Americans, though I don't like to think it, and you have to get an American mighty disguised before he'll insult a woman. But now they've got all this black scum . . . My land ! I'd give anything to know Bella and Madge were safe ! "

His humorous, wavy mouth was drooped in bitterness; when they came to another black and cinder-smelling mile, it almost seemed to Frank as if tears had mixed with the sweat that dabbled his face.

§ 14

It was twilight when they came to the Big Drink, as Zollicoffer irreverently called the Mississippi. Frank never forgot his first sight of it, as it lay grey-white like platinum at the foot of its charred and ravaged bluffs. Its waters spread nearly a mile to the opposite shore, where the jungle was bitten out black against the sky. Grey and black shadows moved on the water, with queer spills of light, and a sheen like the wings of a dove. . . . There was something majestic in its soberness, as if it mourned its slaughtered sons and violated shores, and had foresworn its blues and greens and mirrored reds till the oppressor was driven from the land.

Half a mile to the north the Big Black River poured into the Mississippi the dark current which had given it its name. At the meeting of the waters the fortifications of Grand Gulf crouched like a black monster with red watchful eyes. All the world seemed black and white and grey, a canvas daubed with smoke—there were only two points of colour: the winking eyes of Grand Gulf, and a forest fire raging somewhere in the North-West and every now and then sending up a huge crimson tower into the clouds, a tower which rocked and roared like Babel, and then fell back into the woods.

The hungry and tired troops were fed at Grand Gulf, and given a night's rest under canvas. Frank was too exhausted to eat, and lay awake most of the night strangely conscious of that swift silent current rolling through the woods so near. At dawn the troops were ordered out, given five days' rations, and marched southwards. The Federals were crossing the Mississippi opposite Port Gibson. Having found themselves unable to reduce the batteries at Grand

Gulf, they had marched south to Hard Times, and there, opposed only by a few ancient smooth-bores, and a detachment of sharpshooters, proceeded to cross the river with very little loss or damage.

Early in the morning of the 1st of May they met the advance guard of the Grand Gulf army, which had crossed the Bayou Pierre, and all that day and the next, in the humming May sunshine, the North and the South fought in and out of the ravines, bluffs, jungles, and cane-brakes, struggling for the little clump of burnt houses known as Port Gibson—which in the end fell a prey to the North.

On the second day Frank shed his first blood for Dixie—though neither bullet nor bayonet reached him. He was struck by a flying splinter of a cotton-wood tree, which slit the flesh of his left arm. The 14th South Carolina were then retreating through the woods, and to stay behind meant to fall into the hands of the Yankees. A man in his platoon who was the owner of a large plantation near Meridian had acted as doctor and in certain cases as surgeon, to an army of slaves, bound up the wound—which though lacerated was luckily not very deep—after applying a salve which in the old days he had used indiscriminately for cuts, bruises, itch, or toothache. Frank felt sick and agonised, but he was able to stumble on after the others through the bush, and reached the Bayou Pierre just as General Bowen's engineers were setting their fuses to the bridge.

Early on the morning of the 3rd they were back at Grand Gulf, a draggled and defeated army, having left rags of Confederate grey on all the spines and thorns of the Mississippi jungle, and broken men in grey uniforms waiting for the merciful chance of being picked up by the Yankees as an alternative to being left to starve in the bush or burnt by the forest fires which crept towards them through the undergrowth.

There was talk of strengthening the defences of Grand Gulf, and all able-bodied men were called upon to dig trenches. Frank and those who, while too much knocked about to dig, were yet not thought bad enough to be sent

into hospital, were set to work on the abattis. Then suddenly the order came from Vicksburg—abandon Grand Gulf! retreat to Warrenton! The Yankees had crossed the Bayou Pierre, and would be up at the fortress by nightfall. The half-constructed works were abandoned, and the troops sent to collect stores and baggage—what they could not take with them was to be destroyed. That afternoon was confusion, haste, and grim effort to leave nothing for the Union. By dark the troops were once more beating the road, the men fagged out with their labours, leaning upon each other, the wounded on the necks of the unwounded, the weak on the less weak. Frank hobbled along on the arm of the negro servant of one of the planter-privates. The man smelled horribly of sweat, hair-oil, and dried blood, but without him Rainger would never have got to Warrenton—Zollicoffer having been sent ahead with despatches for Vicksburg. The nigger's attitude towards his charge was like that of a nurse towards a sick child. "Sho, you'm better in a minnut. Sho, we do jest be in Warrenton."

When they had gone a mile there was a sudden roar. The air, the trees and the earth rocked, and a column of cloud and fire shot up into the southern stars. It was the magazines of Grand Gulf blowing up. Some of the troops cheered feebly, others, with shattered nerves, started at the noise. Frank, though he experienced no horror in his mind, felt his body cower and stagger against the black, supporting arm. "Gawd Ermoughty!" said Publius, "dat suttenly wuz a big noise." Then he added reassuringly: "Sho, we do jest be in Warrenton."

But it was not till daylight that they came to Warrenton, where Pemberton's canvas was spread like a white cotton-field in the scattering woods. By that time Frank's arm had swollen huge and purple, as if stung by an adder, and he was straightway sent into hospital.

For a week he lay in a little white cot in Warrenton Court House, utterly dazed at first in the strangeness of pillows and sheets. A tall grey-haired lady nursed him,

and wrote a letter for him to Mr. Bellack—she never stopped asking him if there was any one he wanted to write to, and in time he grew ashamed of telling her there was no one. He had wonderful meals of chicken and hominy, he was washed, and his hair was brushed. It was like a beautiful dream. He nearly cried when they told him he was well enough to say good-bye to the grey-haired lady, and the white cot, and the good food, and the cleanliness, and take his place once more in that army of rags and valour, which was now stubbornly, gamely, but inevitably falling back on Vicksburg—its last hope.

§ 15

Vicksburg, that steep little city on the bluffs, looking down on the mixing currents of the Mississippi and the Yazoo, was all that stood between the army of the Mississippi and defeat. If it fell, the whole of the great river, from Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico, would be in the hands of the Union. New Orleans had gone a year ago, then Baton Rouge, following the Northern rape of Cairo and New Madrid. Only this little stronghold remained, and to the broken, limping army that entered it on the 19th of May, the task of defending it seemed already desperate.

Bit by bit its surroundings had been eaten away by the advancing Federals. General Grant's troops almost doubled Pemberton's, and the South had been unable to win even its accustomed Battle of Pork and Beans. While Frank had lain in hospital at Warrenton, the Confederates had been thoroughly beaten at Champion Hills, and a whole division had been lost east of the Big Black River. Several batteries had, moreover, fallen into the enemy's hands, and the troops were exhausted with thirst and heat, and the fevers of the swamps. Nevertheless they sang as they marched into Vicksburg—

"Wish I was in the land of cotton,
Cinnamon tree and sandy bottom!
Look away! Look away!
Look away down south to Dixie!"

Their voices rang among the houses as they tramped behind their colours up the hill. Vicksburg was full of civilians, refugees from the plantations, and women leaning from the balconies or bunched in the verandahs, joined their shrill altos and sopranos with the rumbling basses and tenors in the street.

> " Wish I was in the land of cotton,
> Old times there are not forgotten !
> Look away ! Look away ! Dixie land ! "

The town climbed steeply up to the church—it reminded Frank of Rye, though here the church was not thick and squab, but sharply spired, pulling the whole hill up into a pinnacle. On the western side the bluffs dropped precipitously down to the river, which lay almost black beneath them, with a gleam like spilled ink. The levees bristled with batteries and casemates, but their warlike terror was belied by the Federal gunboats which steamed up and down the river at Milliken's Bend, undaunted by guns which could not be debased sufficiently to do them much harm.

The troops were billeted in the houses, or camped in the big square. Frank was glad to meet Zollicoffer again. His friend had been to see him once in hospital, but had spent most of the week between Warrenton and the Big Black River.

" Hullo, bub—it's a coon's age since I've seen you. How's the arm ? I'm glad it's better. Say, who d'you think I've found in this little burg ?—my cousins Beaumont from Yazoo City. They moved in here when the Yankees started their Holy War up the Yazoo. I've been to see them already—Uncle and Aunt, cousins Belle and Madge, and cousin Lorena from Georgia, who's been staying with them and can't get home, owing to the neighbourhood being what you might call a bit unsettled. I'll take you around to see them to-night, if you like. I've told them about you."

" Thanks ; I'm not a fit object to take to see ladies."

" Nonsense. You're fine. Meet me here in the square at

sunset. I guess the Yanks 'ull let us alone a bit then. Where are you billeted ? "

" Right here, opposite the church. I'm with Candy and Peters and Bates, and we've Candy's Witsun to do our cleaning."

" Good ! I'm in the Main Street with Fitzjohn. I count we'll know this little old city by heart before we're out of it. We'll have to put the licks in, too, if we're ever to get out at all—with more than our sidearms. They let the officers keep their side-arms, you know ! " and Zollicoffer spat.

" But you think we'll be able to keep the town ? "

" Sure ; but I warn you, it won't be an easy job. For one thing, we've provisions only for sixty days, and there'll be all the women and children to feed. I don't know what they'll do when the guns get to work, poor souls. The Yankees are dragging up their Parrotts from Grand Gulf this afternoon, and I guess they'll be pounding at us to-morrow. The Drink's chock-full of their gunboats too. Ouch ! they'll give us hell ! I tell you, kid, what you've seen up till now's just nothing to what you'll see in Vick before the summer ends."

" Can't we get reinforcements ? "

" They say Joe Johnston's coming up the tracks, but Old Man Grant has twice as many men as Joe's and ours together."

Frank looked up at the church spire as it stood against the gentle morning sky, where a faint smeeth of mist had tamed the fierceness of the sun. The light lay mellow on the church-roof and the house-tops, and drew out the scents of the jasmine and syringa which dripped over the verandahs and garden walls. Through a gap he could see the further shore of the Mississippi, tall wooded bluffs, which seemed all innocent of the death that lurked in their thickets—the grinning Parrotts and Dahlgrens and Jameses which the keen-eyed gunners of Maine and Connecticut were training on the poor little town across the river. Somehow Vicksburg in its stream of sunshine, its warmth and quiet and syringa smells, had about it a devoted air, as if its

stones held within themselves the presage of their destruction. He thought of the time when it was said of Jerusalem, " There shall not be one stone left upon another," and he thought of Rye, which was so like Vicksburg, and wondered how it would look if guns should roar down on it from Iden Ridge, or mortars belch upon it from the Rother. . . .

§ 16

Frank spent that morning and afternoon on the works, but at dusk the weary men were released, and he remembered his promise to meet Zollicoffer in the square. He felt loth and shy—he shrank from this prospect of being brought into an American upper-class household. The wear and tear of war seemed to have entered into his soul and made him unfit to meet those who were as yet unsoiled by it. At the same time he felt a queer longing to mix again with clean and well-dressed people—perhaps the women would wear coloured muslins, pink and mauve and pale sky-blue, like those who had stood on the balconies and sung " Dixie " as the troops marched into the town.

Before he started he made one of those elaborate, pathetic toilets which soldiers make so hopefully in defiance of circumstances. He washed his face and hands and neck at the pump, and sleeked his hair with water ; he tried to get the earth of his digging out of the cracks of his skin. He noticed with horror that his nails were black and broken —he was no fit object to bring into a lady's house. With a skewer-like needle to which he had attached at least a yard of thread, he struggled to mend the tears in his uniform. The most scandalous had been mended at the hospital, but he had torn the shoddy stuff afresh at the works. Some of his companions could mend and patch quite neatly, but he had not yet acquired that branch of soldier-craft, and unfortunately the other boys were out. He ended by cleaning his boots, which were caked with the rich black soil of the Mississippi—that soil he always longed to send home to the poor barren snapes. He was still hot with his efforts when

at last he stood in the square—not such an unpresentable fellow, after all, for his rough life had done much to build him stout and straight, and his week in hospital had not rubbed off all the sunburn from his cheeks.

"Sure, you're a regular Jim-dandy," said Zollicoffer, when he saw him.

They walked together to a narrow street behind the church, where the Beaumont family were in lodgings. An old negro servant admitted them, and led the way to a long dim room at the back of the house, whence they could see the last lights dying over the river. The furniture was dark and shadowy in the twilight; as the two men went in they could hardly see anything beyond a faint smudge of colours in a corner. On their entrance, this dissolved into three pale gowns—a mauve, a green, and a white—and three girls came forward to greet them.

In the presence of these girls, Zollicoffer dropped his careless, slangy manner, and became almost a polished gentleman.

"Good evening, Cousin Belle; good evening, Cousin Madge—and Cousin Lorena. This is my friend, Frank Rainger."

The girls held out their hands, which Frank scarcely dared touch, they were so soft and delicate. The cousins seemed shy, but there was nothing awkward or crude about their shyness. He noticed that before they held out their hands they had curtseyed, their pale skirts cheesing up round them. They made him think of an old song.

"We were just going to open the piano," said Madge. "Scipio has gone for the lamp."

Frank was beginning to trace their features in the dusk. Madge was fair, Belle and Lorena were very dark. When the negro had brought in the lamp, he was able to see them more plainly. They were beautiful girls—Lorena was of a different type from the other two, who were small and plump; she was tall, and slim and straight as a sapling.

The next minute Mr. and Mrs. Beaumont came in, full of old-fashioned apologies for not having been present to

welcome their guests. He was a tall, foreign-looking man, who mixed foreign gestures with his very correct English —he came from an old French family of Louisiana; she was from Georgia, and of a more American type, though she, too, had about her that almost foreign grace which Frank was to find characteristic of most high-bred Southern families. Coffee and little rice-cakes were brought in by the same old negro butler who had followed them from the plantation at Yazoo City. Frank felt delighted to handle the delicate china cup; and the tiny fringed napkin seemed a thing almost too beautiful to use. Yet he noticed, paradoxically, that he was growing less conscious of his rags and scrubbed uncouthness, as if the grace of this family overflowed into his lack, till he too was full of it.

The girls opened the piano, and Belle and Madge played and sang. They had the pleasant, efficient voices of conventionally accomplished young women. They had been educated at a convent school in New Orleans, and the music seemed to blend with the dusky charm of the old room, orange with lamplight, and framing in its uncurtained window the green sky beyond the Mississippi, with Argo like a shower of jewels upon the green. Frank lay back in his armchair and listened dreamily, at peace with the world and himself.

"Won't Lorena sing?" said Mrs. Beaumont, when Madge had finished "Way down upon the S'wanee River."

"Don't trouble her, if she would rather not," said Mr. Beaumont gently, and Frank noticed that Cousin Lorena from Georgia was standing in a drooped attitude beside the piano, her eyes gazing tragically out at the clustering stars.

She straightened herself suddenly—

"But I'd like to sing. What will you have?"

"Give us 'Lorena,' dear," said Mrs. Beaumont; "I always think of that as your own song."

"Because of my name?" she asked, with a lightness which Frank could see was forced.

"No, my dear, but because when you sing it you make romance alive," and Mr. Beaumont made a queer courtly little bow to his niece, as she went to the piano.

"The years creep slowly by, Lorena;
The snow is on the grass again."

A new quality had crept into the singing—this was not the voice of an accomplished pupil of the Sacred Heart, New Orleans. Not that the voice lacked training, but technique was swallowed up in vibrant emotion, in that mysterious sense of the tears which lie in the deep of beauty, and are so seldom reached except by music and the more passionate kind of human love. Frank found himself oddly touched and stirred. The beautiful Southern song had more in it than its own pathos and high-souled romance. Lorena Middleton had made not only romance alive, but something at once deeper and higher than romance, something which Frank had only vaguely felt before, a welding of beauty and tragedy and purity which had hitherto scarcely touched him either in emotion or experience.

"A hundred months have gone, Lorena,
Since last I held your hand in mine."

He found himself looking at the singer with a new interest. Up till now she had been but one of three; now she stood apart, he saw her alone. Her pale, delicate beauty had that exotic touch which he had already noticed in the women of the South, but it had also about it a kind of romantic purity which fixed a gulf between her and that other exotic woman he had loved long years ago. Dignity, remoteness, a kind of delicate shyness were cut out on that small classical profile, shadowed in the black ringlets that fell on the olive cheeks. Her eyes were mysterious, witch-like, the wide red mouth and softly darkened upper lip spoke of a capacity for passion, and yet there was something about her which would never let him think of her but as a young girl; no bloom had been rubbed off her virginity, her innocence was as deep as her adaptability to experience. He felt almost

awed by her, abashed—she was like a woman in a holy book, in a dream following Mass.

Mrs. Beaumont saw him gazing, and began to murmur to him in her soft kind voice.

"Poor Lorena is in great distress because she can't go home to her mamma in Georgia. She came to stay with us last year after—after a great trouble she'd had. They thought the change would do her good, and we'd no idea there would be fighting in these parts. She can't possibly get through to Atlanta now, and she's fretting terribly I'm afraid. A mail arrived this morning and there was nothing for her. It was a great disappointment."

Frank muttered sympathetically, but he did not want to talk, or to listen to any one except the woman at the piano. There were orange smears and splashes of lamplight on her gown of pale mauve organdie, spread over her feet like the petals of a flower, and the lamp had warmly tinted the soft ringless hands that moved over the keys. She lifted her head when she sang, and the curved line of her throat, swelled with music like a thrush's, stood out from the shadows.

"It matters little now, Lorena,
The past is the eternal past;
Our hearts will soon lie low, Lorena,
Life's tide is ebbing out so fast;
There is a future, oh, thank God!
Of life this is so small a part;
'Tis dust to dust beneath the sod,
But there, up there, 'tis heart to heart."

"Thank you, dear," said her aunt; "that was charming. Perhaps Isabel would like to sing now. Take out your guitar, Belle."

Lorena rose from the piano stool, and Frank felt his heart thumping feverishly. Would she come and sit in the empty chair beside him? What a fool he was! It was this unaccustomed comfort and refinement, this glimpse of family life after the long knockabout year, which was making him sentimental and weak-minded. Still his eyes followed her, and his colour mounted when she dropped languidly into the empty chair, her stiff muslin belling

round her as she sat, making her delicate body look all the more slim and alive above its starched bunch.

"It's very warm this evening," said Frank, awkward and perspiring.

"It is indeed—but I expect we shall soon have it still hotter."

"This is a very warm place, I gather."

"Yes—though the river helps keep it cool."

He rubbed his sweaty palms together, conscious once more of his black broken nails, the darns and patches and rags in his uniform, of his clumsy boots, unblacked and gaping from their soles. Then suddenly he saw her eyes fall on his bandaged wrist.

"Have you been hurt?"

"I got a scratch down at the Bayou Pierre. A splinter of cotton-wood tree——"

"I hope you've had it properly attended to?"

"Yes. I was in hospital at Warrenton for a week."

He saw her eyes luminous with interest and pity, her conception of him seemed to have changed. She was no longer languid and conventional, but interested, compassionate.

"How often do you have it dressed? It looks as if it wanted dressing."

"I meant to go down to the dressing station this afternoon, but I've been at work on the fortifications all day. It's nothing—only a flying splinter, not even a bullet."

But Lorena leaned over and spoke to her aunt. There was no good waiting till he had time to go to the dressing station. Let them bind it up for him now. They had a family salve which worked wonders.

Frank found himself being led into a little back parlour, where Mrs. Beaumont and Lorena bound up his arm afresh with pieces of soft clean rag, after they had bathed it, and rubbed in the ointment. Lorena herself did not touch him; she held the cloths, and the ointment-jar, and the bowl of water.

Afterwards they went back to the room where Belle was singing " Shining River " to her guitar. Then came more little home-made cakes and drinks of sherry cobbler, before the two men went back to their billets, to grab some sleep in preparation for the morning's unknown.

The night was very dark and still, with stars scattered over the black sky and in the black water of the Mississippi. Now and then a flare would be kindled on a Union gunboat down on the river, and for a moment the gun-spiked levee, the bluffs, the woods and the clustered town would stand out in a red fiery glow, then flicker into the dark once more.

Frank slept more soundly than any night since he was wounded, but at dawn he had a strange, harrowing dream. He dreamed that he was at home in England, and the town of Rye was threatened by guns which grinned down on it from Iden and Udimore ; and all Iden ridge and the Isle of Oxney were covered with the camps and wagons and tents of a huge army, while the sea was crowded with men-of-war, coughing smoke, and pouring shell on the land. He was full of a mad uneasiness about Maggie, far away up the Rother, on the north slope of the Isle of Oxney, and in his dream he struggled to get to her, panted and pounded his way along an endless stretch of road, which bristled with horrid obstacles and lurking foes. Then at last he came to Mockbeggar, and dashed into the huge kitchen with its high ham-swung rafters ; and there in the firelight sat, not Maggie, but Lorena Middleton, seated as he had seen her that evening, at her piano, singing—

" The years creep slowly by, Lorena,
The snow is on the grass again."

§ 17

The bombardment of Vicksburg started on May 19. The gunboats on the Mississippi began to splutter shells into the town, answering the more drastic boom and thump of the big Parrotts and Columbiads on the eastern

bluffs. The forts of Vicksburg replied, from the levee and from the landward hill. The air shook and roared, and soon the black charnel-smelling smoke of battle dropped over the town like a pall, shutting off the sun from the syringa, griming the white houses, and making the pleasant streets mere dark broken places of terror and stumbling.

The earthworks and redoubts on the land side had been substantially strengthened in the lull that came while the Yankees were bringing up their guns. There were also several good Brooks guns, a match for the Union Parrotts. All the morning the guns yelped and thundered at each other, and the men stood by, awaiting the assault. The river batteries were more than a match for the fleet, but on the landward side the town got badly pounded. The earthworks began to slide and crumble, and if a man showed as much as his head above the rifle-pits he would at once be sniped off by the sharp-shooters who were creeping up the ravine towards the bluff. Then about midday the Stars and Bars was shot off its staff on the Baldwin redoubt, and some of the more superstitious south-western troops looked on this as an evil omen.

At two o'clock the assault began. The Union troops came pouring up the ravine, streaming like floods through a sluice, throwing themselves against the slope of the entrenchments, storming up it in a blue tide, which broke against the parapet in a spume of bullets and bayonets. Again and again the Stars and Stripes were planted on the works, again and again they were seized and snapped and ripped to bits, so that shreds of Old Glory flew through the air like spindrift. But the parapet was the high-water mark of this advancing sea—it could only lash itself impotently against it, there its proud waves were stayed. But from time to time some plucky lad from Delaware or Wisconsin would leap upon it, only to be thrown back-wards with a bullet in him or pulled forwards, an admired prisoner, into the ranks of his foes.

There were not many casualties among the defenders,

and when at nightfall the retreat was sounded and the Union troops fell back on their lines, the tired, powder-blackened men of the South were full of high spirits and high courage. Frank felt thrilled and exalted. He could remember few details of the fight, but he was conscious that they had inspired him. At all events it had been what Zollicoffer called a good " knock down and drag out fight "—no lying on a hill and being pounded by artillery he could not even see.

That night he slept like the dead, and the next day was spent in repairing the fieldworks and entrenchments, while the Yankees waited for ammunition and prepared another big assault. This took place on the twenty-second. The blue tide poured again up the ravine, and broke again upon the bluffs, only again to ebb in thunder and confusion back into the jungle, leaving its wreckage of prisoners and colours in the enemy's hands.

After that it was seen that the town could not be carried by assault, but must be starved and battered into submission. Provisions were scarce, and there was a large civil population which would act as a drag on the garrison, As a matter of fact, at the beginning of the bombardment, the civilians had taken refuge in caves dug in the hill, where though in great terror and discomfort they were comparatively safe and out of the way.

For six weeks Vicksburg was swallowed in thunder. From the river on one side and from the bluffs and forests on the other, death and uproar poured upon the town. Grape, canister, shot, and shell crossed and recrossed each other in the powder-stinking air. Fires broke out, and for lack of time and men to spare could not be extinguished save in a desultory way by the civilians. The white houses blackened and crumbled into ruin, their verandahs which had smelled of myrtle and spitti-sporum now smelled of cinders and burnt rags, their trails of jessamine and wistaria hung in black strings from charred roofs and broken columns. There was always a red glow in the sky, always the smell of burning.

From dawn to dark, and, when the moon was bright, all night through, the Union guns bellowed. At intervals murderous assaults were flung on the redoubts. At other times a scientific enemy, protected by its powerful batteries, constructed parallels, and even attempted to bring up scaling ladders to the forts. Meanwhile the Dixie men fought like wolves at bay; without proper sleep, without enough food, they held the works of the little town which was the forlorn hope of a great campaign. They hoped that in time they might tire the enemy out, as they had tired him out before. There were also rumours of reinforcements—some said General Joe Johnston was at Jackson, some said he had crossed the Big Black River. But there was never that hoped-for snore of guns in the Union rear, never any authentic despatch smuggled through the lines to tell definitely of his advance. The men fed on hope and on rumours as on wind.

There was very little else for them to feed on. Day by day the rations were dropping lower, till at last they reached a total fourteen and a half ounces. Bean-meal was used for bread, corn-meal for coffee, mules and dogs were eaten. The horses were fed on corn tops. The ring of fire and darkness round the town grew tighter, the Union batteries and rifle-pits crept nearer. It seemed inevitable that Vicksburg must fall; yet none of those starved, exhausted men on the ramparts thought for one moment of surrender.

§ 18

During these weeks Frank did not see much of the Beaumont family. By day they took refuge with the other civilians in the improvised shelters on the hill-side, and in the evenings he was far too exhausted to do more than roll himself in his blanket and go to sleep. One night he and Zollicoffer went round to the house in Church Row, and found the family reassembled in it during the lull in the bombardment. The windows had all been shivered by the din of the explosions, but the warm moist air made

it unnecessary, even undesirable, to close the shutters. The Beaumonts superbly ignored the broken glass, the spill of plaster on the floor—which old Scipio swept up with his broom—and the black evil-smelling dust that dimmed the polished surfaces of the piano and side-tables. They spent the evening as before; Miss Middleton sang "Lorena," "Shining River," and "Shady Grove," and Belle sang negro melodies to her guitar. The only difference was that, instead of sitting with eager parted lips and eyes fixed on the pale tragic profile of Lorena as she sang, Frank lay back in his chair, and slept the evening through. He lay with his hands clasped before him, his legs apart, his head fallen a little sideways, in an abandonment of weariness. He was bitterly ashamed when he woke up and realised how he had behaved, but his hosts had taken it in good part—they were glad to have given him a few hours' rest.

Then evenings came in which the bombardment did not cease, but, either by moonlight or by flares, raged on into the night. The men rested in relays—sometimes they would go as long as three days and nights without sleep. Grant was reinforced in the middle of June, and bigger and heavier guns thundered from the bluffs. There was also a continual sputter and grump from the right side of the river, where a battery of Columbiads couched by Milliken's Bend.

Gradually the Federal troops crept nearer, till they were within sharp shooting range of the town, and the batteries of the attackers and the defenders were scarcely three hundred yards apart. At night, if the bombardment lulled, the men on the ramparts could hear the Yankees singing in their entrenchments—

"Oh, never mind the weather, but get over double trouble,
For we're bound for the happy land of Canaan;"

or—

"John Brown's body lies mouldering in the dust,
But his soul goes marching on."

"Sounds mighty pious," Zollicoffer remarked—"like

an everlasting camp meeting. But I was forgetting this is a Holy War. Come boys—you brutal torturers of poor black men—give 'em ' Dixie ' ! "

Then from the dry powder-choked throats of the watchers on the battlements would burst the great song of the South—

> " Wish I was in the land of cotton,
> Cinnamon tree and sandy bottom ! "

—which the Yankees would try to drown with " John Brown's Body," till the guns lifted up their voices and drowned the songs of both North and South.

It was now quite certain that General Joe Johnston was at the Big Black River, but he hesitated to attack the strong Union entrenchments. Meanwhile each day the condition of Vicksburg grew worse. It was a very hot summer, and the heat terribly tried the men—who suffered much from thirst—besides breeding diseases among them and the civil population. Unburied corpses poisoned both air and water. The hospitals were full of sick and wounded, and at last the weakness of doubt began to assail the hearts of the defenders. It seemed impossible that the town could hold out against this deadly and dragging attack, fire and sword without, disease and hunger from within.

One day, indeed, Vicksburg nearly fell. Covered by the fire of their batteries some Missouri sappers began to undermine the bluff on which the chief redoubt was built. The men on the redoubt could not debase their rifles enough to fire on them, and after complimenting them on their pluck, retired a few yards and began to throw up an inner ring of works. They were only just in time. With a grumbling roar the mine exploded, filling the air with earth and roots and pieces of rock. A great pit gaped on the face of the bluff, and into it poured the 19th Missouri, the 6th Minnesota, the German farmers of Pennsylvania, the lumbermen of Maine—all pounding their way up the shattered scarp to where the remains of the parapet lay in heaps of rubble and dust.

But they were not prepared for the second line of defences, nor for the shower of hand-grenades which fell upon them, tumbling them back into the crater of the mine. This was called the "Death Hole," because of the troops that perished there—men of Pennsylvania, Missouri, Maine and Minnesota, struggling and plunging together, with kicking mules and toppling guns, and fiery death blasting among them.

Once again Vicksburg had saved herself, but those in command of her knew that the end was only staved off—it must come. Ammunition was running short as well as food, the men were falling like flies, the town was being burnt and battered to bits, and the women and children were suffering terribly from privation and sickness, so that the men could not bear to watch them as they dragged themselves about.

All night the sky quivered with the light of the burning houses, with the red flashes of the guns, and the flares on the gunboats and the right bank of the river. The sun rose on a country parched with smoke, and the hot sky glowed above charred and stinking bluffs, on a city poisoned with disease and hunger and heat—and so on through a day of sweat and struggle, of uproar, explosion, and death, till once more the bloody sunset hung behind the Mississippi and the Yazoo.

§ 19

"Say, kid," said Zollicoffer to Frank one evening on the bluff, "I guess the jig is up."

"You mean the town will fall?"

"I mean more than that. I happen to know that Pemberton will surrender within a week."

"My God."

"And he's no fool, neither. We're bound to lose the place in the end, and if we hold on much longer things will get even worse than they are now, and all the women and children die. Say, kid, you look green."

Frank stammered. "I—I didn't know I cared so much."

He was surprised at the intensity of his own emotion at the thought of surrender. What was Vicksburg to him? A foreign town in a foreign country; and yet he could not bear to think that it must fall, that so much blood had been shed for it in vain. He could not bear to think of the defeat of the Confederate armies, which seemed to be drawing slowly but inevitably nearer, as slowly but inevitably their strength was sapped, their reserves consumed, their manhood drained. He actually loved this land of Dixie, which eighteen months ago had been no more to him than a "change of scene," a distraction, an anodyne for his despair. He had been wounded for it, he had bled for it, and it seemed now as if he could gladly die for it.

"Good for you," said Zollicoffer, "and I hope some day this country will give you something better than short commons and hard knocks. Now I've a plan. I don't want to march out of Vicksburg, and salute Old Man Grant. I don't want to be paroled off, and not be able to fight for six months or for ever; I don't want to be sent to some gol-darned Pen—they say they've taken to shutting up our boys lately instead of paroling them. So I'm blame well going to beat it."

"How?"

"Slip through the lines some dark night, and see if I can't get over to Joe Johnston at Jackson. Then I might rejoin Bragg on the Tennessee River. I'd like to get back among the mudheads."

"Oh," said Rainger blankly. Then he added—"I'll go too."

"Of course you will. That's what I came to ask you. We could easily fix it, you and I. I'll let you have more details later. Lots of the men are for mizzling out of this burg before the bust, but I count we two go alone, we don't want a heap of fellows hanging around. Of course we may get a bead in us, but on a dark night our chances ought to

be good, and there's no moon a couple of nights from now."

At that moment an orderly came up to the Lieutenant, who moved away, leaving Frank to more emotion and surprise. At last something had stirred him which was not personal, which was not a mere instinct, which indeed thwarted the primitive instincts of love and home. Was it, he wondered, the freemasonry of the earth which had made him its champion here in a foreign land, which made him fight for the cotton-fields as he would have fought for the hop-fields at home?

Or was it because he had shed his blood for Dixie? Perhaps those drops of himself, of his life which had been drunk up by that black Mississippi soil had bound him to it by a sacrament of union. He belonged to it, since his poured-out life had made it richer. The exile had bought himself a fatherland with his blood.

II

§ 20

Two nights later Zollicoffer and Frank stole out of Vicksburg. The air was thick with a thundery stillness, with a miasma of blood and chemicals, powder and soot, the reek of explosion and the reek of corruption.

In the darkness seemed to crouch an impalpable threat. The guns were silent—except for an occasional rifle-crack at Milliken's Bend—but the air seemed still to quiver with their roar, like a beaten thing which still expects a blow. At any moment a sudden flare might go up from the gunboats on the Mississippi, and once more the big Parrotts and Dahlgrens would bark from the bluffs, and send the echoes knocking from shore to shore. A faint light was on the surface of the river, whether from its own waters or from the reflected sky could not be known. The great river alone in all that stillness seemed at peace, slipping on

and on between the jungles, merely its surface ruffled by those swinging keels, or fluffed by some bullet winging across it from Milliken's Bend, as a swallow might stroke it in flight.

Frank and the Lieutenant walked quietly through the unlighted streets. They kept in the middle of the way, for the side-walks were treacherous, split and crumbled. Sometimes in the road great gaps and shell-holes would yawn, but these were distinguishable in the clearer lights of the middle way. Frank was glad that he could not see Vicksburg as he left it—its white houses all smeared and smoked, with their shutters split like broken teeth, their creepers hanging in charred rags and strings, their gardens all smelling of cinders. He liked to remember it as he had entered it two months before, with the sunshine slatting on the white streets through the branches of the cotton-wood trees and magnolias, with the breeze full of myrtle and spitti-sporum, and the balconies all a-bower with muslins and sweet faces, while the women of the South sang " Dixie " to the men marching up the hill.

He thought uneasily of these women now, pale, hungry, and sick. In a few days they would be free—the Yankees would treat them courteously and generously, no matter in what other respects they failed—but he knew that during those months they had seen and suffered things which he was conservative enough to think no woman ought to see and suffer, they had rubbed against all the grim things of violence and corruption. They were marked. Also he knew what their proud souls would endure when they saw the Stars and Stripes wave on the church tower in the place of the tattered Stars and Bars. He and Zollicoffer were running away to escape that sight, but their friends, Belle and Madge Beaumont and Lorena Middleton, must stay behind and look on it.

They had told the family in Church Street of their intention, and the old people had approved of it. The girls had chafed enviously—

" We shall have to see the Yankees march in," said Belle.

" And perhaps they will make rules to insult us, as

Butler did at New Orleans," said Madge, flaring. "We will be ordered to respect the flag and not to speak to Yankee soldiers."

"As if we wouldn't die rather than speak to a Yankee!"

"I shall shut myself up all the time they are around, so that there will be no chance of my seeing their horrid flag or their horrid soldiers."

"I expect General Joe will come and drive them out in a week or so. Tell him to make haste, Mr. Rainger."

Lorena Middleton had said nothing but "Good-bye."

At last the two men came to the edge of the town, where the sentries stood. They did not anticipate much difficulty in getting past. Surrender had been rumoured now for some days; and for some days deserters had dribbled out of the doomed fortress, playing for their chance of fighting under Bragg or Johnston, the odds being the Yankee lines and the cane-brakes of the Mississippi jungle.

"Who goes there?"

The sentry's voice clicked softly into the darkness, as if he feared it might tear the fragile silence and smother the night again in uproar.

"Who goes there?"

"Friend."

"Advance and give the coutersign."

"'All's well in Dixie.'"

"Pass, friend."

A minute later they were creeping down the bluff, their feet sliding and skidding on the soft earth, which crumbled and pilled under them, dropping with them down into the ravine. Now and then the black shapes of trees swam up out of the darkness, and often when they could not see the trees they heard them, scraping their boughs together and rustling in the faint night-wind, which blew up washed and cool from the river. Sometimes they would kick an unburied corpse, whether of friend or foe it was impossible to tell; sometimes the smell of a carrion body drove them away. And always they slid down the bluff, leaving

Vicksburg behind them against the light, slipping into the cup of gloom which the forest held beneath, unknowing whether they would find there life or death. The mangled earth gave with almost every movement, and made queer little sounds as it crumbled and rushed before them down into the void.

At last they were on level ground, beside a creek, which they followed towards the east. They were now approaching the Union lines, and the unbroken silence had something about it of betrayal and omen. They groped and stumbled; they dared not strike a light. Then suddenly a man shot up beside them. They did not so much see him as hear him, the creak of his boots, the rattle of his accoutrements, and smell him, his virile smell of leather and tobacco.

"Who goes there?"

They had foreseen and prepared for this.

"Friend," said Rainger.

"Advance and give the countersign."

There was a rustle in the darkness, a thud, a fall, a crackling, then a silence.

"Countersign—'John Brown's Body,'" said Zollicoffer, as he picked himself up.

"Is he dead?"

"Sure. I got my knife right into his heart."

They stood for a moment listening. Not a sound broke the stillness of the cane-brakes. Then a faint retch and gurgle came from John Brown's Body.

"That's the last of him," said Zollicoffer. "Come on, kid; there may be others about."

Frank felt sick. Though for the last two months he had lived with death, dreamed death, breathed death, swilled death, this piece of necessary butchery made him ill. Who was this man whom he and Zollicoffer had murdered in cold blood? Some happy, red-cheeked young farmer from Michigan, dreaming on sentry-go of an approaching furlough? Had he, as the blood founted up in his throat and choked him, seen for a minute those

wheat-fields beside the Great Lake? . . . Frank pulled himself together with a curse. How could he sicken and faint at the thought of this dead enemy, whom he had never seen, while behind him Vicksburg, the last fortress in Mississippi, blackened and crumpled, like a piece of burnt paper, lay waiting for the spoiler and her doom?

§ 21

For some minutes they crept in silence through the dark forest. Zollicoffer had a compass, which he consulted occasionally by means of a match held in the fold of his coat. Already the scent of the earth and growing leaves was rising above the smell of powder which still hung under the trees. Frank felt a wide leaf laden with dew brush up against his mouth, beading its sweetness on to his dry lips, as if the kind mother would wipe from them the taste of powder and blood with which civilisation had set her son's teeth on edge.

"Hark!" whispered Zollicoffer. "What's that?"

"Some animal."

"Some Yankee! Stand still, don't move—don't breathe. I'll take my knife to him if he comes near enough."

For a moment they stood motionless, with the great swish and murmur of the wind-musicked forest all round them. Then there was a little stir close beside them. Then a soft voice said—

"Don't shoot."

"Don't hurt him—he's only a boy," said Frank, still thinking of the sentry.

"He's a girl," said Zollicoffer. "My land!"

The intruder had struck a match, holding it up to her face, and Lorena Middleton stood before them.

The two men stared at her idiotically, their mouths gaping, their eyes popping with amazement.

"Where have you come from?" stammered the Lieutenant.

"I followed you from Vicksburg. Scipio got me a soldier's hat and coat, and I managed to sneak by the sentries after you."

"But why did you come?"

"I want to go home."

"Ouch!" wailed Pete. "What are we to do now? We can't take you back to Vicksburg, and heaven knows you can't wander around with us in this jungle."

"Heaven knows nothing of the kind," said Lorena, with a vehemence which surprised Frank. "I'm not afraid of roughing it. I'm a good walker, and I've brought some corn-bread and crackers, so we shan't run short of food. I guess you mean to reach Johnston's lines to-morrow."

"We did mean it."

"Then go on meaning it. I shan't make any difference to you. I tell you I'm able to take my chance—you mustn't consider me. But I must, I just must, get home to Atlanta. My mother's there all alone on the plantation, and if I'd waited with uncle and aunt I count I'd be kept away from her another year. Now I can go by the cars from Jackson to Montgomery, and then north to Atlanta. It's my only chance of getting home, and I'm resolved to take it."

"But a girl like you in the forest." . . . Frank spoke for the first time.

"Mr. Rainger, have the women of the South given you such a low opinion of them that you don't think me capable of enduring twenty-four hours' hardship for a good reason?"

"Heaven knows I don't think that. But you and your cousins, you look—forgive me—so delicate. Our Englishwomen are more robust, and yet I'd be sorry to see one of them here in this jungle."

"But you forget that my people were settlers and adventurers only a few years back. Your Englishwomen have long generations of shelter and ease behind them—I have only one."

He could not see her face in the darkness, but her voice rang true. All the same he was daunted by the thought of having this delicate creature with them in the forest; he could not help feeling, in spite of her courage, that she would break on the rocks or tear on the thorns.

Zollicoffer accepted the situation more philosophically. "Well, we mustn't loiter, and since you're here, Lorena, there's no good wishing you back. You must have been pretty smart to have got out with us. Did you see me kill that Yank?"

"Yes."

There was none of Frank's revulsion in her tone.

"Of course, up at V. they bat their eyes at deserters. It was easy for you there. But we're not through the Yankee lines yet. Keep close to Rainger and me, don't speak—for a woman's voice carries further than a man's—and keep your eyes skinned. By the way, have you left a word for your uncle and aunt?"

"Yes, I left a note. They know how frantic I've been to get through to mother."

"Well, we must try and let them have a line to know you're safe. We ought to be at Jackson to-morrow, if we put the licks in; it's an hour after midnight now."

They moved forward again, Frank wondering half-curiously, half-angrily, what would become of them.

§ 22

There were still several hours of darkness, and progress was slow. Their object was a woodman's track, which Zollicoffer hoped to strike about a mile behind the Union lines. Till then they must make the best way possible through the cane-brakes, guided by his compass. The darkness was profound; at times a patch of star-ridden sky would gleam above the trees only to be swallowed up in the black web of their branches. There would occasionally be open spaces, with spreads of water that gleamed a faint grey in the twilight of the stars, and bluffs from which they could

look over the tree-tops towards the Mississippi, a grey snake crawling through the blackness of the jungles. Once they saw Vicksburg, peaking up black against the dazzled sky—ragged, riddled, pierced, like old lace.

Then dawn came, pale grey fingers moving among the trees, parting the branches, rubbing down the trunks, swaying the hoary pendules of Spanish moss that hung like beards from the oaks. And with the dawn the woods broke into a low mutter and rumble, as the guns began again—civilisation bellowing its matins over Nature's peaceful backwoods, drowning the soft chirps, flutters, and rustles with which the morning crept down into the thickets.

"There goes the old burg, busting away again," said Zollicoffer. "I reckon this is the last day of it."

"How far are we from her now?"

"Not more than a couple of miles. It's mortal slow creeping through these cane-brakes, but we'll be on the road before long—besides, it's morning."

They took out and ate part of their little store of provisions. Frank had been able to bring only his army ration of bean-meal bread, but Pete had contrived by some undivulged means to acquire a chunk of roasted mule-flesh, and Lorena had her corn-bread and crackers. It was an odd and not particularly delicious meal which they ate there in the growing light. The sun was up, and had filtered down through the big dense branches, showing Frank exactly how Lorena looked in her soldier's coat. The wide-brimmed hat put some of her face in shadow, but he could see her dark eyes glowing like coals. Her cheek and chin, beyond the shade of the brim, looked very white, but she declared she was not tired, and she certainly was not frightened. He began to feel that she would be less of an encumbrance to them than he had thought.

He was right, as Lorena had been right when she had spoken of the blood of settlers and pioneers which ran in her veins. Delicate, ornately civilised as she appeared, she had not to go back a hundred generations before she found the primitive strength of her womanhood. Her grand-

mother had helped her grandfather build his cabin in the cypress jungle of Tennessee, her strength, her courage, her resourcefulness and patience lay only a generation back for her granddaughter to draw from at her need. The very completeness and quality of Lorena's civilisation made it all the easier for her to cast it from her, for its exaggeration was the exaggeration of a game which a young nation plays —it had not yet become a habit, to flow sluggishly in the blood till it can be drawn out only by a long hæmorrhage.

Her endurance was put to the test, for Zollicoffer did not think it diplomatic to stop when the sun was high and burned down on the dense matting of the tree-tops till the forest beneath was a huge green, airless, steaming oven. They tramped on, their coats over their arms, showing Lorena's full *barège* skirts bunched up round her knees. Maggie, Rita, any Englishwoman of that period, would have shrunk from showing her legs so freely to her male companions, but Lorena, the modest, the elegant, the virginal, did not seem to think of it. She wore a man's top-boots, which fitted her only fairly; but she made no complaint though they must have rubbed her feet.

From ten till four there was little conversation between the three. They tramped doggedly on, the sweat pouring down their faces and down their skins under their clothing. Lorena's dark ringlets were matted and caked on her cheeks, and her breath came heavily from her open mouth. Sometimes they had a drink of a creek or spring, or one of those cool stretches of water, flowing over grass like a Kentish lavant, which Zollicoffer called everglades. The forest was like a huge green conservatory, stifling and steaming, dark, with strange points and dazzles of light. It was full of the voices of birds and the scurryings of animals. Little squirrels raced up the trees, and leaped from bough to bough, flocks of wild turkeys flew overhead, and now and then they startled groups of deer. The forest was supposed to contain bear, but none was seen.

Owing to the dimness which continually brooded in the cane-brakes, there were few flowers. White waxy trails of

wild jessamine occasionally drooped from the branches, and in the open spaces, beside the water, grew clumps of teasel, milkweed and wild rice, and splashes of tiny azure flowers with greenish-grey leaves. But in the dark caves of the forest itself all was green, or else a fleshy, sun-starved white, like the Indian pipe tangling in the sumach and laurel. The very sunshine was green as it filtered through the leaves, and cast a web of green light over the faces of those three tramping through the oven.

At last the heat abated. The sun dipped, and slid his beams gently over the tree-tops, respiting the depths beneath. The darkness cooled, the stewing earth cooled and ceased to steam, the miasma of over-lushness and over-ripeness faded from the air, which became vague with soft pine-scents, spice-scents, and the scents of water which has lain sweet all day in the sunshine. The boom of the guns had died to a faint throb and mutter, like the pulse of a wind. Vicksburg and her agonies were shut off by twenty miles of rolling jungle, which the dusk was softly stroking into sleep.

§ 23

At midnight they camped for a long rest. They were far enough now from the Yankee lines to think of lighting a fire, and the flame and smoke would scatter the mosquitoes which had begun to tease the darkness. Gathering together sticks and dried fern, they heaped them in a little clearing, ringed round with bush. Soon the sticks were crackling, and the flames roaring, chasing fantastic shadows over the huge trunks of the white-oaks, which dipped their beards down from the darkness into the glow.

They ate the remains of their food—all but a few crackers. Vicksburg had not been a storehouse to draw from abundantly, and their hungry expectations dwelt on a breakfast at Jackson, which they hoped to reach early that morning.

"And maybe when we get there, it'll be only parched

corn," said Zollicoffer. "Ouch! It's time we lifted some more pork and beans off those Yanks."

"'Pork and beans! Pork and beans!
We've won the battle of pork and beans!'"

sang Rainger.

"I wish we'd win the battle of roast beef and sweet potatoes, or the battle of buck beer, or even the battle of a good cup of coffee. I tell you, bub, the first thing I do when this blamed war ends is to sit down and have a meal —a meal, I say, not a scramble at parched corn or stale pone or mule-flesh, but a good solid meal at a table, with soup and courses, and niggers to wait on me, and real drinks, not everlasting rum and water, which is all we can get hazy on nowadays."

"I hope it won't be Uncle Sam's meal," said Lorena; "the dinner that he very kindly and forgivingly asks you to sit down to."

"Uncle Sam! Why, I tell you, Lorena, at this dinner of mine Uncle Sam will be under the table begging for crumbs."

Lorena sighed.

"Do you think we're going to win this war, Cousin Peter?"

"Win it? If I didn't think we were going to win it, I shouldn't have bothered to come out here; I'd just have dropped into the Big Drink and make sure of a Dixie grave."

"Nonsense!" said Frank. "You'd have gone fighting on, as you're doing now, to make sure that if the Yanks do win there'll be mighty few of them to shout about it."

"Shout! I'd like to hear 'em shout. Rather than see us beaten, England would step in and save the Confederacy. She can't afford to let us go. She seems indifferent now—but wait till she's touched. Besides, this is only a corner of the war down here. We may be chawed up in Mississippi and stalemated in Tennessee, but we're winning in Virginia—Lee has crossed the Potomac, and is frightening all the Johnny Cakes. The day he gets into Harrisburg, we may forget about poor old Vick."

Having thus delivered himself, the optimist rolled himself up in his overcoat, and went to sleep, leaving the other two to follow his example or talk, as they chose.

Frank felt a little nervous and abashed at being thus, as it were, left alone with Lorena Middleton. He was still unused to the thought of her being there, alongside of them in the forest. He could not lose the image of her in the Church Street parlour, impressive in her flowing skirts, with her lifted chin and imperious profile, her delicate shy manners. He could hardly realise that the girl whose white hands and neck had stood out of the gloom round the piano, who had sung " Lorena " and " Shining River," dais'd like a queen, should be crouching beside him now by the forest fire, footsore, grimed, and sweaty like himself. He felt like the ploughman of some Saint's legend, who suddenly lifts his eyes to see a holy Saint come down to earth and toiling beside him in the furrow.

She was dreadfully tired, too tired to sleep, and that was why, perhaps, they talked till daylight. It was about one o'clock, and the darkness cowled them in, leaning like a roof on the red walls of firelight that rose a dozen feet or so, then blackened into gloom. Now and then they heard the footsteps of some beast, which pattered and crackled near, attracted by the fire, then stole away. Frank could see that Lorena was frightened, but she made no sign, leaning back against the trunk of a tree, her face half hidden between the brim of her hat and the collar of her coat.

After a time, as was inevitable, they found their talk growing intimate. Two friendly human beings could not be shut up together for three hours in a little room of firelight whose walls were all the width of a jungle, without exchanging confidences. Frank found himself telling her why he had come to America—all about the woman who was happier and safer without him, and whom he wished to forget ; and she told him why she had gone to her cousins in Yazoo City. Before the war she had been engaged to marry a man from Detroit, who had joined the Union at the beginning of hostilities. He

had been killed at Big Bethel, and crushed by the blow and all the long bitterness and anxiety which had gone before it, she had gone for a few weeks' rest and change to her uncle and aunt on the Yazoo—only to find herself imprisoned with them in the midst of a war-ridden country, unable to return to her dying father, or, later, to her widowed mother, driven at last to make this unlikely dash for home, which she feared had made things awkward for Mr. Rainger and her cousin Zollicoffer.

She spoke with a simple dignity which increased Frank's reverence. At no time did her confidences become outpourings, and she got from him more than she gave. He told her all about his love for Maggie, his long suffering, the Isle of Oxney, the friends there, and his homesickness. He told her about Tom Coalbran lying far away under the cypresses at Murfreesboro. He found himself greedy for her sympathy—he found himself pouring out his tale like a sentimental schoolgirl, eager for the glow of her eyes and the tender twist of her lips. It was blessed to have to do with a woman again, and a woman like this.

§ 24

When the dawn was yet pale and blue, they set forward again, having beaten out their fire. A kind of chill was in the air—Frank noticed that even here in the almost tropic heat there was before sunrise that little damp whiff of cold which had so often made him shiver on the Rother marshes ; it seemed to be the one inevitably cold spot of the day. But in spite of the chill and their empty stomachs the little party were cheerful enough. Peter and Frank, now sure of having made a good escape, and confident of a breakfast in the Southern lines, found their spirits rising at every stride ; and Lorena, free at last, looking forward to seeing her home and her mother after long exile, was positively gay. All three laughed and chattered together as they marched through the bush. Lorena invited the two young men to come to Maplehead as soon as they had furlough, and

somehow that morning she and Frank as well as Peter felt sure of beating the Yankees before very long.

At last the road licked over a high bluff, whence the woods went thinning down into mere scrubs and oak-barrens, and from the crest they could see the Confederate lines in the valley, spreading round the ruins of Jackson, looking like a gigantic honeycomb, with their tents and tarpaulins. Zollicoffer threw his hat in the air and cheered.

"Hurrah for General Joe!"

Frank was unexpectedly silent. Somehow he was not so glad as he had thought to see that huge encampment in the valley. Now that it was leaving him in scattered scrubs and tuffets, he felt that he loved the forest, and wished he had another five miles of those tall trunks disappearing high above his head into a mat of foliage, that filtered green sunlight, those muffled forest sounds and steamy scents. . . . He felt that the forest had been a good friend to him, and he was loath to leave it—as the ploughman in the legend would be loath to leave the field where the Saint had walked beside him in the furrow.

§ 25

"Jackson,
"Mississippi,
"July 15, 1863.

"DEAR MR. BELLACK,—

"When I last wrote to you I was in hospital at Warrenton, and I had better begin by telling you how it is that I am now at Jackson, and—salute me!—a full-blown Ensign in the 6th Mississippi Regiment. [Here comes the story of Frank's adventures at Vicksburg.]

"When we reached Jackson the first thing to do—after having filled ourselves with hot corn-bread and some really well-cooked horse-flesh, which seemed almost steak to our hunger—was to see how the railroad transport officer would view Miss Middleton's wish to go home to Georgia. Really, sir, American women are wonderful. I have told

you about Miss Middleton in the forest, how she swung alongside us and shared our hardships, and would not let us do anything to make things easier for her, for fear that we should find her a drag and an encumbrance—well, directly she was in Jackson, she was a fragile woman again, leaning on Zollicoffer's arm, her skirts let down and swinging round her feet, I carrying her coat . . . why, her very boots seemed to have grown small and feminine as she walked to the dépôt.

" There were no difficulties raised—one would think American officials like having helpless women drop upon them in the middle of a congested morning—and an hour later, Miss Middleton was in a reserved compartment with one of the officers' wives, who was travelling as far as Montgomery. She deserves a warm welcome when she arrives, for she took big risks to get home. But sometimes I wonder what will happen to the nigger who provided her with her man's kit—I can't help feeling sorry for Sambo now and then, though I'm fighting to keep him a slave.

" Since that day I have been hard at work. I can't say that I feel very different as an officer from what I felt in the rank and file—I wear the same uniform, i.e. the same old rags, with the addition of a new great-coat of undoubted Union origin. I cannot tell you to what I owe my commission, beyond the fact that I am now a ' veteran,' having served with the colours eighteen months. I work much harder than I did as a private, and also I see more of Zollicoffer. The 6th Mississippi are short of officers, and he has been gazetted to the same company, his own men being by this time either under the earth or eating their hearts out on parole.

" I don't know how long we shall stay at Jackson. A characteristic of a small army like ours is that reinforcements are constantly being hustled from one place to another, sent to a weak spot from one less weak. So any day I may find myself on the march again—perhaps to rejoin Bragg, who, they say, is being hard pressed in Tennessee, or more luckily northward to Virginia, where

Lee is pulling himself together after Gettysburg. . . . My God! that was a blow to us, Gettysburg. I was told of it the day of my arrival in Jackson.

"This is the third letter I have written to you since I heard from you. Shall I ever hear from you again? Is it your letters or mine that fail? Did you get my letter telling you of Tom Coalbran's death at Marfreesboro? Poor Tom! I miss him sadly every yard of the way. Sometimes it gives me chill when I think of him lying there far away in Tennessee. But I realise now that his death and burial were less inappropriate than I thought at first. The more I see of this war, the more I am convinced that it is a war of nature and agriculture against commerce and machinery, and Tom has died for the earth he lived and laboured on just as surely as his father died, who lies in Wittersham Churchyard.

"I wonder if Tom has died for a lost cause, if civilisation must assuredly stamp out nature throughout the world. I foretell the time when agriculture will become commercialised—already it is being machinised. Science and mechanics will take over the fields we broke up with our arms and watered with our sweat. At the best the country will be a neatly laid out market garden, and those who crave for solitude and wild open spaces must seek them on the Mountains of the Moon. I suppose it is the inevitable course of evolution—some of us talk Darwin out here, for war has a tendency to make philosophers in spare moments; evolution has made the world habitable, and evolution will make the world uninhabitable again. Is that Darwin or beyond him? But if this is a lost cause, thank God all the same that I am fighting for it. What better battle can a man fight than the battle of freedom and open spaces, of agriculture and the soil, of warmth and growth and sunshine and romance, the battle of the South against the North? And if I die, what would I sooner die for than these common things? When I look back on my life I see that all the best in it has been what the earth has given me—Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter, seedtime and harvest, sunshine and rain, even Adam's price of wisdom, the sweat of my

brow. My literary adventures in London, my love-affairs, have been nothing to me compared to these kind gifts of the ground which is cursed for my sake—and I should like to die for the things which have given me such happiness, to offer my body as a sacrifice to the dust that made it.

" Do you think me rhapsodical and romantic ? Perhaps I am. There is a strange shining and glow in my blood, in spite of hard work in this hot, lazy summer. I feel that at last the past is really behind me, no longer clinging to my marching legs like a bramble, but really shaken off and trampled down. I can't tell you exactly what has done this, but it is a fact that ever since the siege of Vicksburg I have felt a free man. Perhaps it is because I now have a country to fight for. I am no longer an indifferent soldier of fortune. Oh, sir, if only England would join us. She alone can save us. Our cause is righteous, but we are few and poor. Against us is all the wealth and population of the Union, all the outside resources which the unblockaded Northern ports have been able to draw from the great world from which we are cut off. Our valour has taken us far—we have beaten armies twice our size, the Union generals are weak-kneed blunderers compared to our gallant Johnston and Polk and Lee. But we are like a cistern from which the water pours steadily out, with no compensating inflow. Jackson is dead, and we have no one to take his place; thousands of our gallant men are dead, and their places must remain empty too. England approves us and sympathises, but she will not fight. Many out here still think that she will, but since the Alabama kick-up fizzled out, I am convinced that she will never intervene. But this is her quarrel—she will suffer when the factories have eaten up the fields.

" I have written quite enough. You—or rather the void in which I seek you—are my safety-valve; you know I still bear this mark of the writing-beast—when I think, I must chase my thoughts about on paper. Though I shall probably never write another line in the orthodox sense, I still hunt with my pen. In between my letters I assure

you I think as little as the average soldier ; I can make my mind an utter blank for hours at a time, and go to sleep any minute I choose. But sometimes my mind teases me, and then I must write. If I had no one to write to, I suppose I should keep a diary.

" How are they all at Moon's Green—Dave, Eliza ? and at Mockbeggar—Harman and Maggie ? Tell me all the Isle news.

" Yours ever,

" Frank Rainger."

Frank had no answer to this letter, nor to any other, though he sent one through with the mails of *The Times* war correspondent with the Southern armies. So he came to the conclusion that Mr. Bellack must be dead. To the end of his life he never knew whether he liked Mr. Bellack. He had found him a friend, counsellor, and sympathiser, but there had always been about him a remoteness, a detachment from the world's dust which lay between him and the man of struggles like a dividing wall.

§ 26

Towards the end of July Johnston was forced to evacuate Jackson for Meridian, and two months later a detachment including the 6th Mississippi was sent to reinforce Bragg at Chattanooga. Himself bled by reinforcements to Pemberton at Vicksburg, Bragg was no longer able to hold the line of the Duck River, and had retired across the Tennessee River to a meeting-point of rails close to the borders of Georgia and Alabama. It was a heart-breaking move, for it involved the surrender of the whole of Tennessee. For two years now the Southern troops had marched and countermarched in Tennessee—Corinth, Memphis, Shiloh, Murfreesboro were names that had woven themselves into the glory of Dixie ; but now this country crowded with memories of adventure, hardship, and loyalty, of victory and gallant overthrow, must be abandoned by

the troops which had held it for so long, leaving its soil richer by the bodies of some ten thousand of its sons.

Then came complications of a more bitter kind. A weak spot in the Confederacy was touched. The Tennessee regiments began to desert when they saw their State was being abandoned—for days men poured away like grain out of a hole in a sack. This had always been a tendency of State levies when called upon to leave their own State—several of Frank's Mississippians disappeared on the march between Meridian and Chattanooga.

The journey was accomplished partly on foot, partly by rail. The rail was very unsafe, having been torn up in places by the Yankees, and imperfectly repaired. The train crawled and creaked over the lines, often stopping for hours at a time, while parties of engineers worked hard ahead of it. At last it ground its way into Waukatchie Station, where the troops were hurriedly detrained under an irregular fire from the Federal batteries on the hills north of the Tennessee River.

The country was rough and mountainous—ribs of rocky mountain arched away into the clouds, their masses broken up by creeks and rivers. In the north the Cumberland Mountains rose blue and distant, smudged with cloud; in the south humped Look Out Mountain and Mission Ridge, Pigeon Mountain and Buzzard Roost, while far away in the east, beyond the Hiwassee River, the Great Smoky Mountains mixed with the clouds in a muddled mass of grey. The clouds hung low that afternoon, licking wet grey tongues over the dun sides of the hills, mixing with the powder fumes that drifted down the river; now and then above them rose grotesquely the bitten tops, strange arabesques, dark phantoms hanging in space.

The Confederates occupied the valley of the Chattanooga, between Look Out Mountain and Mission Ridge. They were the victorious army which had beaten and disgraced the Union at Chicamauga, but they were in the usual position of victorious Southern armies—unable to follow up their success, hanging on forlornly to their line, knowing

the while that the North was steadily pouring wealth and manhood into the town of Chattanooga, where an army was a-building which would soon advance to wipe out the memory of an earlier disgrace.

The Southern troops seemed disheartened and exhausted. A victory which one is too weak to turn to any real advantage is more discouraging than a defeat. Besides, the autumn rains had set in, driving up the valley with bitter winds and cold drenches of cloud, and the men were poorly supplied with great-coats and blankets. Provisions were short and hard to get in that wild country, seven miles from the railroad. Frank realised that he had made a poor exchange for sunny Meridian, with its quiet camp life, peppered by outpost skirmishes. Here the shadow of a great impending tragedy seemed to lie—like the shadow of Look Out Mountain on the valley, when the little metallic disc of the sun crawled for a minute out of the swags of cloud that drifted against the rocks.

Every day there were rumours and skirmishes. The morning after Frank arrived, the Yankees entered Look Out Valley on the western side of the mountain, and soon afterwards General Hooker drove back the Confederate pickets and joined General Smith at Brown's Ferry, opening communications with Chattanooga. In the middle of the month General Sherman entered the town with large reinforcements. Excited legends flew through the Southern lines—Sherman had brought fifty thousand men and batteries of Dahlgren guns. He was mounting his batteries on the Cumberland Hills, and the range of the new guns was so vast that from thence he could sweep Look Out Valley.

"This army's getting like a boarding-school for misses—too much whispering under the bedclothes," said Zollicoffer one evening at the end of the month. "Some day we'll be told that the Yankees have got a gun that can enfilade us from Washington—and I bet you we'll believe it. We'd better start fighting before our ears grow much longer."

Even Zollicoffer's easy, cheerful nature was feeling the

strain of the long wait—for the battle which hung continually near, yet never took place. Skirmishes rattled the echoes at the mouth of the valley, pickets were driven in on the slopes of Look Out Mountain, shots popped in the dusk under Mission Ridge, but there was no big general advance. And all the time men and supplies were pouring into Chattanooga, while into the valley between Mission Ridge and Look Out Mountain poured only mist and rain.

§ 27

Early one morning, long before it was light, the alarm was given. The Federals were crossing Look Out Creek—the long-waited battle had begun. The 6th Mississippi were sent up the mountain to reinforce the little garrison on the crest. Look Out Mountain was like a fort—rising some six hundred feet above the valley, its top slabbed and toothed with rocks. It provided the Confederate general with an excellent signal station, and moreover effectively cut off the Federal right wing from the main army in Chattanooga. To hold it was of the first importance to the South, and its slopes were now grooved with rifle-pits and its top chock-a-block with troops, strengthened by a battery of Brooks guns.

A coil of mist lay round the hill, hiding the movements of the enemy in the valley, and at the same time leaving the crest open to the stars. The November sky was a-glitter, the stars winked frostily above the black arabesques of the mountains—as far as the eye could reach the horizon was toothed and jagged with the boundary hills of Tennessee. For an hour there was nothing to do but sit and shiver behind the breastworks, and watch the stars. It was the same altered sky which had smitten Frank so unfriendly on New Year's Eve at Murfreesboro—Argo's Poop still rose instead of the Northern Plough. But straight ahead burned a great lamp which had been familiar to him in the April twilight on the Rother Marshes—Sirius, symbol of the Divine Indifference. That huge remoteness, that vast Unknown and Unknowing, had never disappeared in all the

latitudes of his wanderings. The Divine Indifference hung as surely over that Isle of Oxney as over the mountains of Tennessee.

For an hour they crouched there, bitten with cold, their ungloved hands freezing on their rifles, their empty stomachs groaning for food. The reinforcements had been sent up breakfastless and the garrison were unable to supply them with more than a few crackers.

> " Pork and beans ! Pork and beans !
> We've won the battle of pork and beans,"

trolled out a husky voice.

" As long as we win the battle of pork and beans, the Yankees may win the battle of Look Out Mountain," growled another.

" Go to grass, you dog-goned dough-head ! " came from somewhere in the darkness. " It's a mighty fine feed of pork and beans you'll get in the Pen at Cincinnati."

" Ouch ! I'm dragged out."

" I guess the jig is up this morning."

" Ouch ! "

Thus the grumblers on the top of Look Out Mountain, islanded in mist from the world below, where disaster was brewing. As the sky paled and shafts of light ran over the rocks, the mists parted, and they could see fires in the valley, and troops pouring over the Creek and the railroad. The shots of the pickets crackled intermittently in the oak-scrub, but there was no sign of a battle—the main army of the Confederates lay on the other side of the mountain. The mists settled down again and the danger below was shut off.

A quarter of an hour later a despatch-bearer came pelting up the hill-side. The Yankees had crossed the railroad bridge, and were massing at the foot of Look Out Mountain. They would soon attack, and owing to the fog they were safe from the Confederate batteries on the higher ridges. They also had the advantage of being invisible till they were within a dozen yards of the defenders.

The men sent up a hoarse and feeble cheer, and some of

them began to sing "Dixie." But the song draggled out; the men pulled their collars closer round their ears and glanced down their rifles—good Union rifles taken at Chicamauga. Shots and tramplings sounded on the hill-side; there was the sound of sliding earth and stones leaping down into the valley. Then suddenly the mist grew dark, crowded with running shapes—then out of it burst the lumbermen of Maine, firing as they ran, hurling themselves upon the breastworks, till they met in hand-to-hand fight with the troops behind them.

It was an affair of a few minutes. After the woodmen of Maine came the men of Minnesota, then the men of Indiana, then the men of Idaho. Wave after wave rolled up Look Out Mountain and broke relentlessly against the top. It was a battle of mist and darkness, powder and cloud, of black and grey and dirty white, in which the only touch of colour was the mocking brightness of the Stars and Stripes, fluttering on the crest of each fresh wave, like some bird of gay plumage and evil omen.

The cause of the defenders was hopeless—what were their handfuls against these sackfuls? The blue-grey troops swarmed over the slopes of Look Out Mountain like maggots over a dead body. The defence weakened and wavered—men began to throw down their rifles and throw up their arms. Others turned and rushed down the eastern slope into the valley. In vain their officers tried to rally them, to stiffen a back which was broken. The men fled in obstinacy as much as in panic. Half an hour from the beginning of the attack the Stars and Stripes grinning across the valley told General Bragg on Mission Ridge that Look Out Mountain was lost.

§ 28

Such a loss compelled the Southern general to alter his line. He called up his troops out of the valley of the Chattanooga Creek and formed his line of battle on Missionary Ridge, his right covering Chicamauga station, his left overlooking Rossville. The 6th Mississippi, or what

remained of them, were on the right. There they camped round their dirty colours, which Frank himself had brought off the field of dishonour. He felt pained and disgusted. It was the first time he had seen his men run away—it is true that most of them had run only as far as the Creek, and there re-formed, but some had gone off altogether, scattering over the mountains into Georgia and Alabama, shaking off the dust of this bitter and vain struggle far outside the boundaries of their State.

A spirit of fatality seemed to brood over the Southern troops, unlike their usual courageous confidence. It was muttered that Bragg had placed his batteries too low—Bragg was losing his head. The men mumbled and grumbled against Bragg, whose hard-notioned tactless nature had been unable to reinforce the favour his skill and success had won. The spirit of the army had changed—as if the damp sickly fogs had sucked out all the valour of Dixie.

"We've got no music left in us, kid," said Zollicoffer to Frank as they huddled beside the watch-fire under the one blanket available; "we're a seedy dragged-out set of coons, and we're going to be catawamptiously chawed up."

"That don't sound like you, Peter."

"I wish it wasn't me. I wish I was back at Meridian with General Joe. I don't like this place—it feels ugly. My old mammy would say there was a Voodoo Bogey-Boo about."

To Frank, too, the place was somehow fatal and threatening—there was a dark presage in the air. The very shapes of the mountains looming among the stars seemed mysteriously to suggest thoughts of disaster and overthrow; and when he slept he had a queer dream of Indians, the red men who used to live in these hills and had given their harsh chattering names to all the crests and creeks . . . he woke confused, his thoughts full of muddled, leaping figures, dancing and brandishing axes, while a kind of screaming died in his ears. It was dawn, and through the curling mists he could see the Stars and Stripes flying on Look Out Mountain, on the battlements of Chattanooga, and on Orchard Knob at the north end of the Ridge. In the valley watch-

fires paled as the light of day crept down on them, and when the dimness scattered, the place was seen to be swarming with ambulances, ammunition and commissariat wagons, and all the vastness of the Federal host.

The battle began by an attack of the Union left wing. The Confederate right this time stood firm. The men were not so hard pressed as they had been on Look Out Mountain, and most of them were ashamed of the show they had made that day. There was, moreover, a mixture of fresh troops, and all had been fed and revived by a night's rest. They stood firm while the Illinois and Vermont regiments stormed their line, and General John Smith, with his Ohio reserves, tried to turn the position from the west. Then in one proud noisy moment they assumed the offensive, leaping out of the rifle-pits, and hurling Illinois, Vermont, and Ohio down the slope, with a bag of three hundred prisoners and seven stands of colours.

This opening success encouraged the men ; they threw off the dragging spirit of foreboding which had weakened their spines, and though the Yankees re-formed out of musketry fire and returned to the assault, they stood their ground and wiped yesterday's mud off the Stars and Bars.

Believing his right to be the important point, Bragg reinforced it at the cost of his centre. All the morning regiments had moved along the crest of Mission Ridge to support General Hardee's position. The fighting was desperate ; both sides held firm, the Yankees could not drive the Confederates off the hill, nor could the Confederates chase the Yankees back to Chattanooga.

General Grant on Orchard Knob had watched that procession of men and guns along the top of Mission Ridge, he had seen the centre stripped and filleted to strengthen the right, and it was on that flabby, boneless centre that he ordered Thomas's army to throw itself through the mists of afternoon. The men advanced under Sheridan, Wood, and Baird—while Hardee and the pick of the Southern army swung to and fro against Sherman on the left, they poured up the western slope of Mission Ridge, sweeping the scrub,

driving the defenders out of the rifle-pits and the fortress of the rocks.

"They've broken through our centre."

That was the message brought to Hardee's sore-pressed troops above Chicamauga, and the words were confirmed by the crowd of fugitives which could be seen pouring like rats down the east slope of the Ridge, making for Mission Mills. The ardour and endurance of the right wing, their unwavering effort to wipe out the disgrace of the day before, had been useless. Fate had played against them in this last desperate game, and Bragg's army was beaten out of Tennessee. The troops which had fought so hopefully and triumphantly at Shiloh were utterly defeated and disgraced at Chattanooga. Bad generalship—a total and unaccountable succession of mistakes on the part of one famed for his strategic skill—was partly responsible for the disaster, which could also be put down to inferior numbers, and the exhausted, pessimistic state of the men, who, worn out with their hardships and lacks, had for the first time lost faith in their lost cause.

Hardee was able to hold his position till nightfall, but with his left all exposed by the crumbling away of the centre found himself obliged to retire under cover of darkness. As soon as the skies had mounted the Sign of the Divine Indifference, the last of the Confederate army marched out of Tennessee. The hill-side was covered with the dead, with those who had given their lives for the lost State.

Frank saw their pale faces gleam in the light of the stars, and he thought of them lying there in their young manhood, mown down, bruised like the grass. They were to be left behind, for the foe to bury, and their dark huddled forms were piteous on the hill-side. But somehow as he walked among them, he could not pity them. These boys had won from life such grace that envy was more appropriate than compassion. He thought of the little scrape and lick of life that would have been theirs in ordinary times—most of them were mere boys, what would they have known more than the common round of the homestead and the town?

Generally speaking, love would scarce have touched them, but now, pressed on suddenly into manhood, they had fulfilled their man's estate. Wives and sweethearts had opened the deeps of human experience to those who normally would not have paddled beyond the shallows of calf-love. They had known, too, death and agony, hardship and adventure, struggle and triumph, the goodness of a great cause—and all in a few short years of youth. That they in a short time had fulfilled a long time—he could not pity them, these dead boys of Chattanooga.

. . . And then suddenly he bowed himself and sank down among them. A prowling Yankee's rifle had cracked from a pokeberry bush, and he had fallen, with a terrible pain in his breast, but quite content.

§ 29

When he came to himself the pain and the content were both there still. He was in the Military Hospital at Dalton, twenty miles south-east of Chattanooga, under Buzzard Roost. They told him that at first he had been taken to Ringold, and only brought out of it just before the Yankees marched in. Now he came to think, he had dim memories of confusion and discomfort, of being carried in and out of buildings, or railroad cars, of jolting, of groans and pain. But all that lay behind him in a mist, at present he was content and at peace, in spite of the pain. He lay in his narrow white cot, and stared at the high walls of the hospital, which was adorned with strange blazonings and inscriptions—it had once been a Court House, and the home of the Mayors of Dalton. Nurses and doctors moved to and fro—men were carried in, moaning painfully, and carried out, strangely still. He had all the dear luxuries of Warrenton, he was washed, and fed on new-laid eggs and delicious milk ; sometimes people came and examined him and hurt him horribly, but that was only sometimes, and he endured it calmly—or at any rate thought he did—for the sake of the

following peace. He hoped they would let him stay at least a week, as long as he had stayed at Warrenton.

One day he felt much better, and asked the nurse if she thought they would turn him out before his week was up. She told him he had been there two months.

This was upsetting, and he began at once to ask questions. Had he been badly wounded?—Where was the army of Mission Ridge?—Where were the 6th Mississippi and Lieutenant Peter Zollicoffer? They told him that he had been shot through the right lung—pneumonia had set in, and he had nearly died. It was queer, he thought, that he could not remember any of this. The army of Mission Ridge was now on Buzzard Roost, going through the usual winter stalemate. General Bragg was gone—discredited by his defeat—and General Joe Johnston had come, Commander-in-Chief of the armies of the West, and was drilling raw Georgian levies round Dalton and Rasaca. The 6th Mississippi and Lieutenant Zollicoffer were at Rome. Perhaps in a week's time he might be able to see his friend.

In due course Zollicoffer arrived. He was strangely subdued and dumb, his slang dribbled slackly, he coughed and blew his nose. This irritated Frank, who asked him what was the matter, to which the other answered roughly —"You!" Frank pondered a moment.

"Is it because I'm sick?"

"Sharp kid!" said Zollicoffer.

After that he came often. He was stationed just outside Dalton, drilling Georgian militia, and awaiting the inevitable advance from Chattanooga which must come with the spring. There were many conjectures as to which way the Federals would jump. Would they invade Georgia? or Alabama? or would they first scour Tennessee and Mississippi clean of the detachments which still lingered and teased the Yankee occupiers? The usual rumours buzzed about as to reinforcements and supplies. "We're the long-eared ones," said Zollicoffer, "we're the gossip-gulpers." But those same long-eared gossip-gulpers worked hard to fit themselves to meet the enemy their rumours had made.

The Georgia militia and raw levies of cavalry from the surrounding district were being untiringly drilled by officers trained in the practical college of a three years' war. " If we put the licks in," said the Lieutenant, " we shall have at least a platoon to meet each Yankee regiment, and a gun to face each battery—but we'll have to work."

As the year advanced, Frank grew much better, and instead of dreading having to leave hospital, looked forward to the time when he could rejoin his regiment. His wound was healing nicely, though he still coughed a good deal, and there was now no doubt that he would one day be fit for service. (He was never told that at one time the doctors thought he would have to be invalided out.)

Towards the end of March the doctor said he could probably return to duty in a couple of months. Meantime he was well enough to leave the hospital, and would be granted a month's sick furlough, at the end of which he could report himself.

Rainger felt a little blank. It was all very well to grant him so generously a month's furlough, but where was he to spend it ? He had no friends to go to, and he could scarcely knock about by himself, as, apart from the fact that he was still extremely feeble, his pay for the last few months had been intermittent, and all he possessed were a few " shinplasters " of doubtful currency. He confided his qualms to Zollicoffer.

" You're a dough-head," said Peter unsympathetically. " If it came to the worst I'd pack you off to my old mammy in Savannah. I've no home of my own, but she'd take you in and nurse you and feed you on pumpkin-pie and hoe-cake till you bust. However, there's no need for that. Have you been so ungrateful as to forget the invitation of my cousin, Miss Lorena Middleton, to come to Maplehead, Atlanta, C.S.A. ? "

Frank flushed painfully—he had certainly not forgotten. " But I can't go there when I'm sick. I'd be a confounded burden to them."

" Will you quit insulting American women in my

presence ! They'd rather have you sick than well. They'll nurse you and spoil you and feed you and fuss you, and have you hearty as a buck at the end of a month. I'll write to my Aunt Middleton by to-night's mail."

" But——"

" Oh, go to grass ! It'll be the making of you—a month at Maplehead. Maybe I'll join you in a week or two. They promised me a fortnight's leave this spring."

The flush died slowly from Frank's cheeks. He lay in the whiteness of his cot and hospital shirt, drumming his fingers on the sheet. The sunshine was creeping up the wall, over the lettering and blazonry, pouring through the high window, beyond which the clouds sailed over the pale spring sky. His thoughts had run back to the Isle of Oxney. He was thinking of the primroses which had now begun to bloom again at Wassall.

§ 30

At last, through the humming softness of an April day, Frank found himself travelling towards Atlanta. He was still white and shaky, still coughed at whiles, but he had lost all his languor, the pessimism of early convalescence, and was feeling once again as he had described himself in his last letter to Mr. Bellack, full of a strange eagerness and freedom. He had forgotten the pain and discomfort of his illness, the bitterness and humiliation of the defeat at Chattanooga, the gathering thunder-cloud of the next Federal advance ; he sat by the open window, drinking in the sweet warm air, watching the rolling hills and chestnut woods of Georgia, wondrously confident of the goodness which had allowed him a new hire of all this beauty.

The train clanked and ground between Dalton and Resaca, paused hissing on the rails, hung for long waits at points and signal-boxes, but when it had passed the latter town, and swung clear of the huge camp which spread from Buzzard Roost to Rome, it gathered itself up and ran choking along, thirty miles an hour, like the South Eastern Railway at home. Now it was running through a country

untouched by war, a peaceful country of rolling hills, sunny creeks, and chestnut woods all deep in heyday green—"Shining River" and "Shady Grove" he called it, remembering Lorena's songs. There were big plantations where the darkies could still be seen working in the wheat and maize which had been planted, instead of cotton, for the hunger of the times. There were flour mills and cloth mills beside the creeks—and everywhere there was sunshine, and sweet scents a-blowing down the wind. The stretch of country between the Oostamaula and the Chattahoochee seemed to have been rented from the war by spring—not the rainy, mould-scented, pale-skied spring of the Isle of Oxney, but the warm, bursting fertile spring of the South: not the spring of tiny pale buds on a black bough, but the spring of heavy leaves and a drench of flowers, crops half ripened and gardens all a-bloom.

The train rattled on—past Kingston, Allatoona, Mirietta, Vinings, across the Chattahoochee, to where the mills and factories of Atlanta sent up tall chimneys into the sunset. Frank felt rather weak and shaky as he climbed out, and walked down the platform leaning on his stick. A negro in a neat but faded livery came towards him—

"Evenin', sah! Am you fur Missy Middleton at Maplehead?"

"Yes—that's it."

"I done have a buggy outside fur you, sah! Kindly come and step dis way, sah."

Frank followed him to where a buggy, like the servant, neat but dilapidated, was waiting outside the dépôt. The nigger pulled a huge rug from under the seat, and wrapped it round Frank's knees.

"De missis done say I wuz sho' to tak spechal care ob you, sah."

"Thank you. I'm very comfortable. Is Maplehead far from here?"

"Nawsuh, not more'n tree-four mile."

Frank leaned back in the buggy, enjoying his thoughts and the sweet air. He was beginning to lose the vague shy-

ness which had made him at first hang back from the visit. Mrs. Middleton had written him the kindest letter, welcoming Peter's friend to her house, and begging him to come as soon as he was well enough to travel. Also he was thinking more of Lorena as she had been in the forest, less of her in her stained-glass window. He knew that he would never see her again as she had been then, in her rough coat and her big boots, with her hair moist on her forehead, and her mouth gasping in the heat, but those hours of hardships and dangers shared had taken all the coldness out of his thoughts of her, he felt for her now a little creep of warmth and fellowship—however remote, pure and fragile he might find her he would never think of her as a being quite apart, as an angel standing on the altar. She was a woman, approachable to his thoughts and his emotions.

Sambo's " tree-four mile " pulled out to nearly six, the road winding most of the way through the chestnut woods, where the shade was almost darkness. At last they drove through a wooden gate, propped open at the entrance of an avenue of persimmon trees, and a minute or two later he saw a long low house, built of cotton rock, whose yellow softness the weather had gently moulded, blunting the angles and snubbing the corners, till the whole had acquired a soft aged look, the mellowness of a stood cheese. . . . A big verandah swept round it, trailed with clematis and jessamine already in flower. The porch was thicketed in syringa, and under the green bush with its white and yellow stars, he saw the flit of a heliotrope muslin and a grey.

The next minute, with the help of Sambo and his stick, he had climbed stiffly down from the buggy, and was shaking hands with Lorena and her mother. Mrs. Middleton was much younger than he had expected—though there was no real reason why he should have expected her old. She was dressed old, as the custom of her time and set decreed, but her smooth olive skin, dark hair, and lively eyes, could not have belonged to a woman much over forty. Lorena, in the company of her mother, was more girlish than she had appeared at Vicksburg—after all, she was probably not

much more than nineteen though she had the figure and carriage of a woman of twenty-five.

They welcomed him kindly, and Mrs. Middleton took him at once to his room, so that he could wash and rest after his journey. She treated his miserable little bundle of clothing, tied up in a gingham handkerchief, as if it was the usual luggage for a gentleman to bring on a visit to a lady's house, and bade Sambo—whose real name was Shirley—" carry up Mr. Rainger's bag," in tones that made it a portmanteau at least.

Frank had not slept in a bedroom since he came to America, and there was strangeness mixed with the sweetness of the low shady room, its window shaggy with creeper, its floor dappled with the shadow of a big magnolia tree. He had slept in a cot at the hospital, but that narrow makeshift had been very unlike the high wide bed which lay dim and inviting at the back of the room. When Mrs. Middleton had gone, he went up to it and patted it softly, almost reverently —" Feathers," he murmured to himself, and his tired limbs ached for it.

Then he looked in the big cheval glass. It was the first time he had seen himself in anything larger than his little cracked shaving-mirror, and the sight was discouraging. He was neat, but with that painful scrubbed neatness which suggests long time and effort. His grey Confederate coat was buttoned up to his chin, to hide his want of linen—he had only a homespun shirt on his back, and another in his bundle ; his clothes had been cleaned and mended in hospital—that was one of the many good points of hospital —but his trousers had been uncleansably stained by the mud of Look Out Mountain and Mission Ridge, and his big boots were of a mottled dullness which no elbow grease of Shirley's would ever make shine. His hands, he felt, had been improved by his illness—they were white and thin, and the dirt of months had yielded at last to hospital soap and water. His face—for the first time he really considered his face ; it was broad and ruddy, in spite of his illness, which had, however, washed out the sunburn ; it was topped by a

thick bush of reddish hair, parted in the middle in the American fashion; it was lined, terribly seamed and furrowed and lined—God help him!—it was the face of a man of fifty, and of course he was nearly forty now. He had forgotten it somehow till then, in spite of the burdens his manhood had had to bear—he had lived and larked with men much younger than himself, and he had been pals with Zollicoffer, who was only twenty-eight and called him "kid." So he had forgotten that he was a middle-aged man, whom suffering, hardship, and exposure had made to look older than his years in spite of his fine hair and teeth. But now he suddenly remembered, as he stood looking at himself in the cheval glass of that elegant room. A stupid disappointment and pain went into his heart, and he turned dully away from the glass.

§ 31

Then came a month of healing—when he forgot that he was sick and shabby and middle-aged. It was queer, because what made him forget his shabbiness was the beauty and elegance of Maplehead, and what made him forget his age was Lorena's youth. Hers was not the raw, aggressive youth of some girls, but a shy delicate thing like herself, crowned with a dignity and ripeness all its own. She was playful—he often saw her from his window skipping about the lawn with her little dog, or romping with the piccaninnies that trailed about the plantation in red and yellow chemises—but she was never kittenish, never hoydenish, or arch. After all, the times had made her sober—she and her mother were constantly busy making shirts and mufflers for the troops or preparing delicacies for the wounded; besides, on these two women hung the care of a large plantation, with no man to help them and revenues much reduced. Many of their slaves had gone with others in the neighbourhood to the seat of war, there to be used for works of construction and for lessening the labours of the gentlemen-privates. The household at Maplehead lived very

humbly, compared with earlier days, but to Frank it was a paradise of luxury and elegance, of ease and beauty and shady quiet.

His day flowed languidly like a stream. In the morning he walked in the chestnut woods or the plantation, sometimes alone, sometimes with Lorena and Mrs. Middleton. In the afternoon he lay and slept on his wide white bed, while the shadow of the magnolia flickered over him. In the evening he lounged in a long chair in the verandah, while the two women sat by him and sewed ; sometimes he pretended to read—there was a small library of English classics, old and thumbed, at Maplehead—but more often he lay in tranquil idleness, watching the sun dip behind the persimmon trees, and send their long shadows running over the lawn, while the sky paled to a watery green, and the air thickened with spicy scents of myrtle, verbena, oleander, and spitti-sporum, steaming up in the twilight from that big bushy garden, where the white bloom of the Spanish Bayonet gleamed waxily through the swale—till at last the April moon glided up behind the chestnut woods and brought back into light the mystery of path and bush and bristling cactus leaf.

Then they would go indoors, for the perfumed air was chill, and Frank would sit at a table dainty with silver and glass and fine linen, and eat a meal which the clever ladies and their Mammy had wrung out of Southern scarcity ; and afterwards Lorena would sit down to her piano, and sing " Lorena," " Shining River," and " Shady Grove," in her soft vibrant voice, till the clock struck the hour of his early bed-time.

It was a beautiful life, and one to which he was utterly a stranger. Mrs. Middleton and her daughter often laughed together at his naïve delight in the simple luxuries at Maplehead—his unconcealed admiration for their silver, their furniture, their flowers, their big shady rooms. His pleasure at being waited on, having his breakfast brought to his bedroom, his clothes brushed and cared for, seemed to them touching and innocent. As a matter of fact all this was more

novel to him than they supposed, for he had not lacked these things merely through a long campaign but throughout his whole life. This was actually the first time he had lived with gentle-people. Though of good birth, he had been brought up on a farm, and with the exception of his brief straying into Grub Street, had lived a rough farmhouse life till he exchanged it for the still greater hardship and roughness of soldiering. The ladies at Maplehead did not know that this was almost the first time he had used a table-napkin, eaten with a silver spoon, had linen to cover him as well as to lie on, experienced a dozen little things which are scarcely noticed in a gentleman's household.

At the end of the fortnight, Zollicoffer arrived on furlough, and that altered the grouping of the little party. It might have been thought that the couples would have linked according to ages, Lorena and Peter leaving Frank to Mrs. Middleton. But the contrary happened, and while the Lieutenant companied and amused his hostess, Frank and Lorena wandered together in the plantation and the woods.

For some little time Frank had known that he loved Lorena, but the knowledge brought him no disquiet, as it might have done had he anticipated it far away back in Vicksburg, or even at the beginning of his stay at Maplehead. Gradually the difference in his age, manners, and circumstances had been smoothed by the quiet flow of life with these two women, as the irregularities of a stream-bed stone are smoothed by the waters which flow over it. He knew that Lorena and her mother did not view these things as many others viewed them. He was to them a man who had fought and suffered for the cause they loved—his age stood merely to the credit of his zeal, his poverty and uncouthness were honourable mention of the hardships and griefs he had endured for Dixie. True he was penniless, could not at present support a wife, but Lorena was not the woman to fear to trust her happiness to the future—if she loved. And he knew she loved him.

It was that twofold knowledge—of his love and hers—which made the life of those weeks paradisaical. They were

in that ideal stage of courtship when all has been felt and nothing has been said. They were in the enchanted outer-courts of love, with their eyes lifted up from afar towards the mercy-seat. He knew she loved him—that he had helped wipe out the pain of the dead hero of Big Bethel, just as she had wiped from his heart the pain of the woman in Kent. She made no show of her love, but it was, in its invisibility, as actual to him as the air he breathed, as the scent of the oleanders at dusk. For the first time in his life he and a woman perfectly understood each other without words or caress. They were both utterly sure of each other as they sat under the drooped chestnut boughs, or in the scented, painted sunshine of the garden; both at once longed for and dreaded the time when their understanding should become human and perishable in the vows and caresses that lovers use. . . .

He sometimes wondered whether he would ever have loved her if she had not, so to speak, come to life in the forest. She had wanted just that much of flesh and blood. Now she was perfect, her mystery divine, because he knew that beneath it throbbed a humanity as warm and frail and resolute as his own. The best about her was that she so entirely lacked the rawness and stickiness of a girl; she was not a girl—she was a glorious unity of child and woman. She had all the innocence of the one, all the passion of the other; as child he reverenced her, as woman he loved her.

His love grew and deepened with the weeks. Soon he knew not only that he loved her but that he had never loved like this. He loved Lorena with all that was best, most ardent, most pure in him. His love was no sudden transient burst of passion and spring as had been his love for Rita Simons long ago, nor was it a habit and hunger, like his daily bread, as had been his love for Maggie. It was more like a worship—a first touch of the long-deferred religious impulse in his heart. It exalted him, and yet it had all the best of earth in it.

It made him strangely diffident, it taught him how little he knew of women. After all, though he was nearly forty,

there had been only two women in his life—for he could not count the publican's daughter at Rolvenden. He had spent almost his whole life with men, and he preferred them to women. He had never tired of his exclusively male companionship during the last three years, nor hankered, like so many of his comrades, after petticoats. He had never " taken girls out," escorted them to theatres and dances, he knew nothing of their small tastes, ideas, and prejudices—for he had had just enough knowledge of the species to realise that Rita and Maggie were not good types, one too fluid and the other too solid to be representative.

But now he was learning. With the ardent quickness of love he learned from Lorena a score of little delicacies and motions, which he copied to please her. With so little talk, it was wonderful how much he learned—small graces and refinements, small courtesies to which she had been accustomed as belle of the Atlanta balls before the war. He was growing more fastidious, more careful of his person, and thanked heaven at last for his gentle birth. He studied her pleasure in all that he did. For Lorena, unlike the other two women he had loved, demanded as much of him as ever she promised to give.

§ 32

It was a blow from the outer world which broke the spell. But for that there is no saying how long things might have drifted between a pair of shy contented lovers. One morning telegrams arrived for both Rainger and Zollicoffer, bidding them report themselves at once at Dalton.

" I guess that means Uncle Sam is on the march," said Peter ; " d'you feel fit for another buster, kid ? "

Frank nodded. " I guess I'm ready for John Brown's army."

" Then pack your grip, and we'll ask Mrs. Middleton if we can have the buggy around to take us to the dépôt."

He disappeared shaking his shoulders and whistling

" Dixie." Frank did not follow him. He stood staring at the crumpled summons in his hand—which called him away from peace and love, and the graces he was just beginning to appreciate, back to the struggle, to the bellowing guns, to the splintering woods, to the hill-sides greasy with blood. . . . He cursed himself and straightened his back. All this violence and horror was what he had come to America to seek. He had not come out after love or quiet or beauty—he had come out to fight, had sought war, and belonged to war, and must go back to war from this interlude of peace. But before he went he would secure to himself the peace he was leaving. He would speak to Lorena before he said good-bye. There can be no parting in the outer courts of love—only those who kneel together in the sanctuary can dare to say good-bye.

On his way to his room he met Dinah, Lorena's mammy, and asked her where the Missies were.

" Missy Middleton and Missy Lorena am sho' up at de smoke-harse, helping Chloe wut de ams. But Shirley he done go tol' em dat de massas leave."

" When you see Miss Lorena, would you kindly tell her that I shall be in the parlour, waiting to say good-bye ? "

" Yassah. I gwine suttenly tell Missie dat."

It did not take him long to roll up his belongings in the gingham handerchief, though these had been increased by two shirts and two pairs of socks which the ladies had made and bestowed. Then he picked up his bundle and ran down to the parlour. It was empty. Shirley had no doubt gone on his errand with true Southern deliberation, and Lorena had not yet come back from the smoke-house—a small building with an enormous chimney, where hams and pork-sides were cured and smoked. He stood in the middle of the parlour, eagerly staring out of the big French window through which he would see her. The room was deep in sunshine, spattered as usual with the flickering shadows of leaves. He unglued his eyes from the window and ooked round it—it was haunted

by memories of dusk and lamplight, of Lorena sitting in the basket chair, bending over some piece of knitting or needlework, or throned at the piano with her songs; its corners seemed to hold in their shadows the flit of her heliotrope gown, its silence the trip of her feet and the lilt of her voice.

A faint stroke of sadness passed over his spirit. It was not the thought of her singing, or even the sad familiar words—like most Southern women, she was conservative in her repertory. He knew that he would soon hold the singer in his arms, and the mock-sorrow of a song was not likely to depress a man who had drunk so deep of the real cup. The sadness seemed rather to lie in the room, in the sunshine, even outside in the drowsing greens of myrtle and cactus, in the perfumed colours of the borders. The sunshine crept over the faded furniture, and the leaves danced.

A blue-bird was singing, away in the persimmon avenue, and a bee was humming in the room, lazily bumbling over the flowers—sweet-william and phlox in great bunches on the piano and work-table. The trouble deepened on Frank's heart—contracted it. This was not the mood of a man awaiting the woman he loves, awaiting her in perfume and sunshine, to the singing of a bird and the humming of a bee.

A shadow fell across the room, and turning round he saw her coming in at the window.

"Lorena!" he cried.

She came forward, and her eyes were very wide open, her lips a little parted, and just a brush of colour on her dusky cheeks.

"Lorena," he repeated.

"Mammy told me you wanted to say good-bye."

"Yes—and much more."

"What?" she asked with all the directness of her modesty.

She was standing close to him, he could see her bosom rise and fall under the delicate organdie muslin where a

little stalk of verbena was pinned. His emotion suffocated him, and he who had declared he had so much to say, found himself unable to speak a word.

He saw that she was breathing fast—the sprig of verbena rose and fell very quickly. And the perfume of it was all he was conscious of as he took her in his arms, stooping his face close to hers—not kissing her, just holding her close, with the softness of her face against his rough cheek, and the fragrance of her in his deep painful breathing.

They drew back from each other, and though still not a word had been said, they knew that the spell was now broken. Their love, without words, had been declared—as the bride and the bridegroom of days to come they stood before each other now.

It was not till some minutes later that he kissed her, and in the interval their tongues were loosed and they spoke much, she leaning up against him.

"I wonder I dare love you," he said at last, "some people would call me an adventurer. And so indeed I am, for my adventure is to love you. But I'm a poor soldier of fortune, Lorena, without money or people—I have nothing to give you."

"Isn't it enough that you have given yourself to my country?"

And it was then that he kissed her.

§ 33

When the two officers reached Dalton that evening, they found General Joe's army in full retreat. The Yankees, advancing from Chattanooga, had threatened the Confederate flank on Buzzard's Roost, and the town was now chock-a-block with troops, ambulances, supply wagons, field kitchens, all streaming out towards Resaca and the South. The dépôt and the lines outside it were crowded with baggage and freight-cars—stores and supplies being taken into Georgia, with crews of engineers to tear up the rails behind them.

Dalton was to be evacuated according to a deliberate plan of Johnston's—by which he retreated slowly into Georgia, defending one by one the ridges between Dalton and Atlanta, till his enemy was bled like veal by repeated assaults on strong positions. Then, when he had lured him into the midst of a hostile country, far from his base, he would turn on him and smash him to pieces.

At present the Union forces were far too big to smash. The Army of the Cumberland, the Army of Tennessee, and the Army of Ohio were advancing on Georgia under General Sherman, the hero of Chattanooga and Mission Ridge. Their object was Atlanta, also the ironworks of Etowah and Rome, and the cotton and woollen mills and ordnance factories of the State. But, as usual, rumours grew thick in the Confederate lines—it was said that Sherman had sworn by John Brown's Body to march slap through Georgia to Savannah, burning and destroying everything on his way, till he had made a path of desolation through the midst of the Confederacy, cutting the South in two, and ruining its wealthiest State.

Frank was now fighting directly for the woman he loved. He stood between her and the advancing enemy, between her and the man who would blast and ravage Maplehead, leaving her beggared and homeless, or worse—for it was known that coloured pioneers were with the Yankees, and horrible stories of their licence and bestiality buzzed about the lonely farms of Georgia.

It was not till they came to Resaca that Frank had opportunity to tell Zollicoffer of what had happened to him and Lorena. The train from Atlanta had been crowded with officers and men hastily called, like them, from furlough, and moreover a detachment of Georgian militia, armed with flintlocks, on their way to headquarters. Then at Dalton all had been racket and hurry and the two friends had been separated on the march, so it was not till they had halted on the Oostenaula River, below Resaca, that he and Zollicoffer were able to sit down together and light their pipes. Then Frank told him.

"I can't think what she sees in me," he finished naïvely.

"Well, I must say, kid, I didn't calculate on your getting crazy about each other. It didn't strike me that she's any more your style than you're hers."

"She's just wonderful."

"I guess she is—I guess she's a plum-beauty. But you always struck me as a simple sort of cuss, that 'ud fight shy of a dandy girl like Lorena. I'd have thought she'd scare you with her grand airs.

"So she did at first. But when I got to know her I felt different."

"Anyhow I'm blamed well pleased. To tell you the truth I never thought Lorena would marry such a decent chap as yourself. She was belle of the Atlanta balls the year before the war, and all the big pumpkins were after her; and then this Yankee chap came along, all eye-glass and cravat, no end of a shanghai, and I'm blamed if she didn't give every one else the mitten and take him for her beau. I can't help saying I was mortal glad when he went off his handle at Big Bethel."

"But I'm a damned bad match for her, Zollicoffer. I'm just a soldier of fortune—without a penny."

"Don't let that rile you, bub. When this dog-goned war is over, we'll see about getting you some sections of cotton-land. Then, with your knowledge of farming, you ought to be rich in a couple of years."

"I should like to settle here as a planter when I'm discharged."

"And so you will, then! You and Lorena will settle down together. Our women here don't wait till their men don't want help from them before they come on as helpmate. Perhaps you could work Maplehead for her and Aunt Middleton. They'll want a man. But I reckon all this is not for to-morrow nor the day after, so I'll turn in and have a nap while the Yanks will let me."

He rolled himself up in his coat, and in two minutes was sound asleep. Frank sat up beside him, and in the light of the watch-fire wrote to Lorena. As usual his

thoughts flowed more easily on paper, and for the first time he was able to tell her at least a part of all the hope and love and thankfulness which was in him. Then he too rolled himself up and fell asleep, to dream of a sunny plantation, where he and she lived together, and grew six crops of cotton a year. He had reached an age when realism will intrude itself sooner or later into romance.

§ 34

The army did not stay long at Resaca. A flank movement by General McPherson threatened Johnston's communications, and about the middle of May, Resaca was abandoned for Etowah, forty miles further south. Here the Confederates entrenched themselves, covering the approaches to Marietta and the Chattahoochee River.

They were now in the midst of that shining, happy country which Frank had seen from the train window, the country that had never seen the war, where the grain-fields were untrampled and the woods unscarred, where the stacks stood securely by the farmhouses, and the cattle pastured unstartled on the green slopes of the hills. The villages drowsed a-straddle their sleepy streets like villages of Sussex and Kent—the white and yellow walls of the planters' houses gleamed through the cinnamon and cotton-wood trees, and the scent of wayside gardens blew with the dust which the troops kicked up on the pike.

A week later, the whole country was changed. It was as if a blow had fallen on the smiling, sleeping face of a child. The maize-fields and wheat-fields were crushed into a mere mess of trodden stalks and dusty earth, the wheels of the guns had cut deep wounds in the soil—the trail of the wheels went everywhere, across corn-fields and orchards and gardens, like the furrows of some infernal plough. The woods were gapped with shell-torn alleys where the tree trunks ended in sinister white tassels of split pith ; of the farmhouses, only the tall chimneys stood,

blackened with smoke, while the stacks and dwellings were just a heap of rags and cinders. The cattle were dead or driven away, and the green slopes of the hills were scarred with entrenchments, livid with the raw soil thrown up by the spades, so that from a distance it looked as if the earth herself were smitten with sores.

"This," said Zollicoffer one evening, looking round him, "is war—much more than any battle-field covered with dead bodies."

Frank stood beside him and looked down at the dead farms in the valley, the dead fields, the dead trees, the wounded, leprous earth—all casualties in man's quarrel. Sirius might mock, but the earth did not stand aloof from man's warfare—she shared his quarrels and bore his pain, she was afflicted with his affliction and beaten with his stripes.

In spite of the horror of that blackened scene, he almost found comfort in it, till he remembered Maplehead, still sunny and untouched, but inevitably conscious of the doom that hung over it. He had not heard from Lorena since he joined his regiment, but probably, with all this movement and uncertainty, such a silence was unavoidable. He wrote to her almost every day, and his thoughts fed on her.

His life seemed to have been gathered up now into one purpose. For the first time he saw his existence as a whole, all the twining tangling threads of it woven into a complete and glorious pattern. He had never loved like this, or thought himself capable of loving so. He sometimes laughed when he remembered that three years ago he believed himself to have reached the uttermost that life had to give him of love. He had not guessed this bounty beyond. It was an experience that could be seized beforehand by imagination. He realised now that he had loved Maggie as many men love—simply, passionately, unselfishly—but that his love for Lorena was something beyond the common experience of mankind. It was all the stranger in a man of middle age, in whom

till then the religious instinct, whether in love or faith, had slumbered. Sometimes he asked himself what he had done to deserve, not only Lorena, but his own love for her. It seemed to him that it might be that he, who had always loved and served the relentless force of life, should be allowed to see Him from a better vantage than his cranny in the rock, where, like Moses, he saw only the blinding hinder parts of his god.

§ 35

About a week later, General Johnston, following out his plan, abandoned Etowah and retired to Lost Mountain. Here, on the range of hills between Pumpkin Vine Creek and the Chattahoochee, desperate engagements were fought, while Sherman sought to turn his flank. Both armies threw up entrenchments, and the fighting mostly consisted in storming and defending these. It was a case of siege and counter-siege, and the Confederates fared the worst, because they were so poorly equipped with breech-loading rifles, that a large number of men were wounded in the hand and arms as they raised them to charge their muzzle-loaders. When the fighting was in the open, they generally had the advantage, though the Yankee army had gone far in valour and efficiency since it bolted at Shiloh.

It was at Lost Mountain that Frank first met a Yankee as a man—as distinct from an enemy. An assault was made on the Confederate position, chiefly by Illinois and Idaho troops who were beaten off, leaving about three thousand dead and wounded on the slope. Sherman asked for a truce to bury the dead, and officers, even generals, took the opportunity of meeting and speaking together. A young Ensign of the 19th Connecticut offered Frank a cigar, and was surprised to hear that he was an Englishman. "You look like an American, and you talk like one," he said—which surprised Rainger, though when he came to think it over he found it only natural.

He marvelled at the smartness and neatness of the

Yankee's uniform—the good blue cloth, with its gold frogs and brass buttons, so different from his own mangy home-spun coat and common civilian trousers crammed into Union boots. All the Yankees were trim and dapper, well dressed and well fed. They all wore the regulation service cap, with its peak and slouch, unlike the Confederates who were either hatless or wore the unmilitary wide-brimmed hats of farmers.

"These men," said Zollicoffer scornfully, "look like dog-goned *soldiers*."

Soon afterwards, Johnston retreated on Marietta, and thence to the Chattahoochee, his last defence before Atlanta. This continual system of battle and retreat was very trying to the moral of the troops, and desertions became more and more common. Complaints of General Joe's tactics were heard throughout the army, at head-quarters, and in the Southern Press. But he stuck doggedly to his plan, confident that one day Sherman would put himself in a position when he could turn and rend him. Meantime he did all that he could to harass his communications by frequent cavalry raids, but as the numbers he could afford to spare were small, no real or permanent damage was done. If Wheeler's men tore up the lines for five miles north of Dallas, the Yankee engineers were on the spot in an hour or two, and soon had everything straight.

Frank found himself able to stand the exhaustion and privation of the campaign better than he had expected. Thanks to the comfortable care of Maplehead he had recovered his health with a thoroughness which any one who had seen him in hospital would not have thought possible. The long marches through the dust, or through the torrential rains of June, the nights on the cold earth, in the dew, the unresting day's grind of tramping and fighting, could not wear down a body built up so well. All the whiteness and grace had gone from him now, and he was once more the tanned, ruddy, freckle-faced, iron-thewed soldier who had never imagined that Lorena Middleton would come near enough to earth for him to love.

He still wrote to her, and still heard nothing. Probably she never got his letters. Now from the Chattahoochee he could see Atlanta—as he had seen it from the train that happy May evening, with the chimneys of its mills and foundries rising against the sunset. But he saw it now as he had seen Vicksburg a year ago, as a devoted city, marked out for doom. General Joe had retreated to its outskirts and yet had not found his opportunity for smashing the invader. Sherman was mounting his big guns on the hills beyond the Chattahoochee ; the war had followed Lorena from Yazoo City to Maplehead. Soon the big shells would roar and burst over Atlanta as over Vicksburg, those tall mill chimneys would be broken and topple down into the streets, the white houses would be blackened and the jasmine on their walls turn to burnt reeking strings, and in a month, perhaps, Atlanta would be like Vicksburg, all riddled and singed, its broken walls standing up against the sunset, pierced and ragged, like torn lace.

§ 36

It was towards the middle of July that the Confederate army marched into Atlanta. The men were dispirited and exhausted. For two months they had been steadily falling back before the Yankee advance ; they had seen one strong line after another abandoned to an enemy whose strength and numbers always made it possible for him to turn his opponent's flank. Dalton, Resaca, Etowah, Lost Mountain, Marietta, the Chattahoochee, had one by one been given up to the invading army. The troops had been promised that one day their turn would come and they would seize and destroy General Sherman and his hosts. But here they were at Atlanta, and no big battle had been fought, and behind the Yankees lay an avenue of pillage and desolation ; these strangers from the North had been allowed to march through their beloved State, and burn and seize and devour all that came to their hand, sparing neither sex nor age, poverty nor wealth, so that

Sherman's march through Georgia was to become a byword for all that is most ruthless and devastating in war.

The grumbling of the men was echoed at head-quarters. President Davis himself was indignant at Johnston's obstinate campaign. It was soon rumoured that the command was to be changed, and General Hood appointed Commander-in-Chief. The Confederate generals were falling thick as Union generals in Virginia—Polk had come to grief at Chicamauga, Bragg at Mission Ridge, and now General Joe, hero of Mississippi and Tennessee, had met his fate in Georgia. He had been too strategic, and he had mistaken the nature of strategy, which is to direct, not take the place of, action. He had also put too much confidence in the moral of his army, whose spirits, low after the defeat at Chattanooga, were not equal to a long series of retreats. If his plan had been successful and he had managed to grip and strangle Sherman, far from his base, in the midst of an enemy State, then he would probably have stayed the popular commander he had been at Jackson and Meridian; but it had failed—perhaps it was bad generalship and perhaps it was bad luck.

Meanwhile, there had been a lull at Atlanta. The Federals had crossed the Chattahoochee, but for the time being advanced no further. The Confederates took advantage of the truce to complete the town's defences, connecting the redoubts with curtains, and throwing up works to cover Peach Tree Creek and Decatur on the Georgia Central Railway. For a couple of days Frank was so busy with the construction of these defences, that he had not time even to ride out six miles to Maplehead. But he had a letter from Lorena the evening of his arrival at Atlanta—it was the only one he ever had from her, and he kept it to the end of his life.

"My dear Love" (ran the elegant, pointed handwriting)—

"At last I feel that something of mine will reach you, so I send this in to town by Shirley. I had a letter

from you three weeks ago, mailed at Dallas, but since then I have heard nothing. How are you, my dear love? I hope you have not fallen sick again after all the trials and hardships you must have suffered since you left us. If you had been wounded, I surely would have heard. If your duties allow, I beg you to come out to Maplehead some day. My mother is sick. I think it is the heat and the rains which have given her a fever and ague. The doctor says her heart is weak. How I think of you and rely on you, my dear love, in this trouble! Do come to Maplehead. I have no more news for you, save that I have gotten a new song, 'The Orange Grove,' which I think you will like.

"Good-bye, for the present, my dear love, my gallant soldier.

"For ever yours,
"LORENA."

On the third day Frank was able to ride out to Maplehead, inelegantly mounted on a pack-mule, which covered the distance only a little faster than his own legs. He found Mrs. Middleton very ill, unable to leave her bed, and Lorena, he thought, looked worn and anxious, with bistred rings under her eyes. He tried to persuade them both to come into the town, thinking they would be safer there, and perhaps yielding a little to his craving to have her near him, but they were loath to leave the house where they had always lived, and where Lorena's father had died. They were out of the direct line of any Yankee advance, and probably safer here among the hills than in streets which might any day be swept with shell. He came to see the force of their reasoning, but thought dejectedly of the long miles which lay between Atlanta and Maplehead.

However, he and Lorena had all the day together, and the freedom of the plantation, where the air was thick with the dusty smell of ripe corn, and the nutty sweetness of hot leaves baking in the sun. Except for the few moments following his declaration, it was the first time

that he held her in his arms to love her. For the first time he had her for long hours to himself, to hold her soft strong body against him, to stroke her neck and cheeks, and take from her lips the kisses he had dreamed of.

She was passionate and pure as flame. In spite of that aloofness which had been the first thing he noticed in her, she thrilled and surprised him by her capacity for emotion. Her delicate and virginal body was but a crystal vessel for the dark grapes of passion. He had not met a woman at once so fiery and so chaste, and her chastity impressed him as the outcome of pride and breeding as much as of instinct. There was nothing in it of coldness or crudeness, ignorance or materialism. In the blood of her mixed race flowed all the pride of the North together with the fiery abandonment of the South. Full of romance and passion, full of the joy of giving, she also demanded much of him to whom she gave. She set a price on herself, and strove to be worth it.

They wandered together through the plantation, under the persimmon and cotton-wood trees, through the broad-leafed alleys of the maize. They sat in little arbours drooped with vine, and in corners where he could reach up for bursting figs and give them to her to eat. The flowers in the garden were hot and parched—the big roses bowed their stalks, the whiteness of the lilies was soiled with brown smears; only the big red flowers of the cactus seemed to thrive and exult in the heat. But the summer was like a delicious drink to the lovers—its scents, its heat, its languor, were all part of the passion that consumed them. The blue throbbing sky that hung over the hills, the chestnut woods beyond the plantation, the house that seemed to swim in the sunshine, were all linked with the ecstasy which the weight and warmth of Lorena brought to Frank's arms, with the scent of her hair, of her gown, of her delicate powder-dusted skin—so that he knew that whatever happened now to part them, the summer must always bring her back.

In the evening they returned to the house, and found

that Mrs. Middleton had come down to the parlour to pour out the corn-meal drink which took the place of coffee in war-time. There was raspberry vinegar too, and little cookies, and when at last Frank mounted his sulky protestant mule, Lorena gave him a basket of peaches to take back to Atlanta. Her face was very pale as she lifted it to him for her good-bye kiss ; it seemed as if he had kissed all the colour out of it, and her hair was a little bit tousled, and he saw that he had crumpled her gown. He had wooed her like the clumsy soldier-farmer that he was.

§ 37

Once or twice in the week that followed Frank was able to ride out to Maplehead, and gulp more happiness from Lorena's kisses. But soon things happened that shut him in Atlanta. The lull in the Union advance ended, and three armies converged on the town from Peach Tree Creek and the Chattahoochee. The siege works had been finished, but the Yankees under MacPherson succeeded in taking Potter's Knob, an important hill overlooking the city, and mounted their batteries at once. From thenceforward came a series of skirmishes and engagements, culminating in the bombardment of Atlanta. It was the tragedy of Vicksburg over again, and Frank was glad that Lorena and her mother had stayed where they were. Maplehead was as yet far beyond the Union lines, protected on either side by the Georgia Central and Macon Railroads, which were still in Confederate hands. It was possible that the Federal troops might never reach it, for Sherman's numbers were not large enough for him to circle the town, and he clung to the line of the Chattahoochee, sending occasional detachments to damage the rail at East Point and Jonesboro.

If Vicksburg had suffered from its exposed position on the hill, Atlanta suffered from its exposed position in the valley, surrounded by hills on which the Union batteries were mounted. All day long the shells flew screaming

over the town, crashing into the streets, toppling down chimneys and steeples and warehouses, while the townspeople hid in their cellars and listened to the ruin thundering over them.

Hood tried to make a diversion by sending the whole of Wheeler's cavalry to harass the Union rear and cut Sherman's communications, but the damage done was, as usual, pitifully small. Wheeler's force was not big enough to be effective, and the smart Yankee engineers, with their equipment of perfect tools, had soon straightened his clumsily twisted rails and filled up his sketchy gaps. Then disaster swept down on him from the North. Steedman advanced from Chattanooga, and chivvied and harried and worried him right out of Georgia into Tennessee, and thence into Alabama. The result was that Hood found himself quite without cavalry except for a few scattered units. And then, to crown the irony of it all, a strong Federal detachment advanced from the Chattahoochee, attacked the West Point Railway, and destroyed it for twelve and a half miles, twisting rails, burning ties, making huge yawning gaps which they stuffed with trunks and rocks, with torpedoes here and there among them—as if to show the exasperated Hood how such things ought to be done.

§ 38

One day in August the bombardment ceased; for two whole days no shells dropped on Atlanta, and the people began to creep out of their holes and cellars and make the best of their battered homes. The town buzzed with questions and conjectures. Where were the Yankees? Had they retreated? It was soon discovered that they had abandoned their lines, and the whole of Atlanta breathed again with relief and hope. The troops, accompanied by herds of townspeople, went out to inspect the empty works. They marvelled at their strength—at the depth of their entrenchments, and the sure construction of the abattis and redoubts. Why had the Northern

army fled? It was rumoured that Sherman had feared for his communications, had suspected movements in his rear. Perhaps the ruin he had inflicted on north-western Georgia had satisfied him, and he saw the wisdom of returning to his base.

Soon terrific stories were afloat. A huge army had collected under General Forrest in Tennessee and was marching on Chattanooga. . . . The Yankees had been catawamptiously chawed up in Virginia by General Lee, and all their forces were concentrating to defend Washington. . . . The army of Virginia had sent a detachment to the rescue of Georgia, which had fallen on Sherman's rear and forced his retreat. Thus the townspeople pleased themselves. Meanwhile, Hood, without his cavalry, for some days found it impossible to discover what had really happened. Dreading some plot to his rear, he ordered off Hardee's corps to Jonesboro, a few miles south of East Point on the Macon Railway.

During this gossiping, questioning peace, Frank was able to pay one or two visits to Maplehead. He found the ladies very white and shaken after the bombardment, the noise of which had rattled their windows and bellowed in their chimneys day and night. As soon as it ceased Lorena was able to send Shirley into town and get news of her lover's safety, but when she held him in her arms again, she wept and trembled, her courage for the moment gone. She was worn out by those hardships of the soul which are the lot in war of those who cannot take a hand, but must sit and watch a big catastrophe overwhelm them and a big adventure pass them by.

On the last day of August he rode out again, and was taken by Dinah, not, as usual, to Lorena in the parlour, but to her mother, as she lay on a couch by her bedroom window, wrapped in a lavender josey, with a lace cap to cover her abundant black hair.

She told him why she wanted to see him alone.

" I want to ask you to marry Lorena soon, almost at once. I know you have planned to marry her after the war, when

you have set up as a planter, and can offer her a home ; but I am asking you not to wait for that. The doctor tells me that I probably have not much longer to live, and I cannot bear to die knowing that I leave her alone. If she was married to you she would have a protector in these terrible times when it is not fit for a woman to be without one. She might be able to join you in any town where you were stationed for long—and you would be close to her here, if the army stays at Atlanta. I know that men, especially Englishmen, hate to marry a woman until they have made a home for her, but I ask you to sacrifice your pride for my sake and hers."

Frank could not speak. He had always looked on marriage with Lorena as a far-off goal, towards which he strove over endless, dusty miles. Now that he saw it near its glory dazzled him, the distant lamp had been thrust into his face, and he was blinded.

Mrs. Middleton guessed the reason of his silence.

" She loves you," she said gently, " and I love you, and if I can give her into your protection, I shall die in peace. It is hard to die, for I am not very old yet. But my husband is there waiting for me, and I should not dare complain of being called to him, if it weren't for Lorena, who is left alone."

" Does—does she know ?—have you spoken to her ? "

" I have, and of course she is willing. She loves you very deeply, Frank."

" I know, I know," he murmured, hiding his face in his hands.

" Perhaps you would like to go and talk to her about it."

He rose hesitatingly.

" You mustn't die," he said.

" Perhaps I shan't—but I'm afraid I shall. However, whether I die or live, I shall be happy if I know she is in your keeping. I know you would die for her, if need be, Frank. Besides, there's another reason. Why should you wait ? This is war-time, and happiness in war-time is often only a bird of passage."

He knew what she meant, but all he said was—

" I shall go to Lorena, and speak to her now."

" You'll find her in the garden."

So it was the garden which in its April coolness had watched the mystery of their undeclared love, and in its August glow had shared the passion of their first caresses, that saw another stage of their union passed and fulfilled. Lorena echoed her mother's words with candour and dignity. She did not hang back and blush when he suggested that they should be married as soon as the necessary preparations could be made—that is to say, with her small requirements and the lesser formality of the American law, not later than the end of the week. She promised herself to him with a proud and simple boldness, fulfilling in her promise her love to her mother, her love to him, and her own delight.

They did not talk much about it afterwards, but walked as usual in the shade, swinging their linked hands. He did not take her in his arms, for men are more spiritual in passion than women, and his hour of ecstasy had made him a priest, worshipping at the altar of her beauty.

" Behold, thour art fair, my love ; behold, thou art fair ; thou hast dove's eyes. . . . Thy neck is like the tower of David builded for an armoury. . . . Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins, which feed among the lilies. . . . Thou art all fair, my love ; there is no spot in thee."

Late in the afternoon they went into the house, and she sang to him—her new song, " The Orange Grove," and the old songs which he knew by heart, but always wanted again, " Shining River " and " Shady Grove " and " Lorena." They made him think of her on that evening long ago at Vicksburg, when he had first seen her in the room full of dusk and lamplight, with the constellation of Argo scattered on the blue twilight of the window behind her.

" The years creep slowly by, Lorena,
The snow is on the grass again."

He watched her pale throat swell and shake like a bird's, and the dear face above it glowed like a white flame under

the cloud of her hair. Her lips were the colour of a dove's feet.

> " We loved each other then, Lorena,
> More than our tongues could ever tell ;
> What might not we have been, Lorena,
> Had but our loving prospered well ? "

At Vicksburg those lines had made him think of Maggie, and no doubt had made her think of the dead and glorious Ted Slocum. But now Slocum and Maggie had passed together out of emotion into memory. He never thought of Maggie now, for an old love is like the evening's fire seen at dawn in its dead crumble. Long ago he had loved a woman as he loved the spring, and a woman as he loved the earth, but now he loved a woman as he loved the stars, and the broad pale sky, which cannot end like the spring, and has no bounds like the earth, but, timeless and spaceless, belongs to eternity.

Before he left he saw Mrs. Middleton again, and it was settled that he was to speak to his colonel, and, if no objections were raised, marry Lorena that day week. Perhaps he would be able to get a few day's furlough to spend with her at Maplehead.

He was giddy and exalted as he rode back to Atlanta. Happiness had swooped suddenly down upon him from the sky, and caught him up to the tops of the mountains. " Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse ; thou hast ravished my heart. . . . How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse ! how much better is thy love than wine ! . . . A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse . . . a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters and streams. Awake, O north wind ; and come, thou south ; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. . . . I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse ; I have gathered my myrrh with my spice. . . . Make haste, my beloved, and be thou like to a roe or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices."

He became aware of a man who straddled the road before him wrapped in a cloud of sunset-speeding dust.

" Stop," cried a voice, and pulling up, he saw Peter

Zollicoffer beside him, his shoulders white with dust. Frank stared at him and saw that his face was white too, drawn and set, with frantic eyes.

"What's the matter?" he blurted, suddenly dragged down to a dusty earth.

"The Yankees have stolen a march on us and turned our flank. They have cut off Hardee at Lovejoy's Station. The whole army leaves Atlanta to-night."

§ 39

That evening was a nightmare of chaos, noise, hurry, glare, and darkness. The army was in a sickening plight. With his flank turned, his communications cut, Hardee's corps shut off at Lovejoy's Station, and probably by this time smashed and scattered, there was nothing for Hood to do but order a retreat. Atlanta was untenable; he had been jockeyed out of it, out-flanked, out-manœuvred, proved a bigger fool than General Joe.

Some of the townspeople packed up their goods and announced their intention of going with the troops. The streets were full of gallopings and scurryings, the rumble of wheels, the crack of whips, the rattle of hoofs. It was the Confederate general's object to make Atlanta as poor a prize as possible to the Federals who would march into it the next day. All those stores which could not be taken with the army were to be burnt, the magazines were to be blown up, the dépôt and rails destroyed.

Rainger was kept so busy with these preparations that he had no time to think. Besides, the shock of Zollicoffer's announcement seemed to have palsied his rational powers. He scarcely realised all that this flight involved—his abandonment of Lorena, the postponement of their marriage, the exposure of Maplehead to the victorious Yankees, who would now overrun the neighbourhood, breaking and burning. All he knew was that he was helpless, that he could not even send out a message to her, that he must leave her to learn his flight the next morning from

the smoking, abandoned town, and the flapping of Old Glory. By that time he would be miles away, unable to help her, ignorant of her welfare, perhaps wounded or dead, while the roof of her home flamed over her head, and the damned blue-coats trod into a wilderness the magic garden where he had loved her.

But as yet he hardly realised this. He and Zollicoffer worked like brutes, helping the army to bundle its stuff out of Atlanta and destroy what it could not take. One by one the big wagons were packed up, and lurched off behind their teams. Sometimes one of them would break down under an overweight, and immediately the mules would be unyoked and it would be set alight, blazing away in the middle of the street like a bonfire on Independence Day.

Soon bigger fires began to streak the sky, as the storehouses and mills were set ablaze. The flames roared up into the darkness, wiping out the stars, and dense whorls of smoke were blown down into the streets, making the soldiers choke, and covering their faces with smuts, till their teeth gleamed out of them like the teeth of coloured men. The big factory where uniforms were made, and where thousands of bolts of cloth were stored, was soon sending showers of sparks into the sky; the flour mills were blazing too, and the big metal foundry—the flames tearing through its chimneys, and horrible roars and crashes coming from inside it, as its machinery fell through the floors. Small houses were burning too, ignited by the sparks, humble victims of the great woe.

In the early hours of the morning they were all out upon the road, troops and citizens, on their way to Lovejoy's Station. Just as they left the town their ears were nearly burst by a terrific roar, a crash as if the sky was falling. It was the ordnance trains exploding on the lines, and for some time afterwards there was a rain of black papery stuff, blowing and settling everywhere, while a sooty film came down on all surfaces, smudging the walls of farms five or six miles away.

The stream of men and horses and wagons was choking

the road to Lovejoy's Station. The wagon wheels were tearing it to pieces, and sometimes the wagons stuck, and crashed together, and there were oaths and shouts and frenzied cracking of whips. Guns, caissons, wagons, mules, ambulances, men on foot and men on horseback jostled and struggled together in the way. Frank was driving a supply wagon, for in that rout anyone took a hand to anything, regardless of rank or custom. The night was noisy with words of command, the shouts of the drivers to the mules, the shouts of the soldiers to the civilians to get out of the way and let the guns pass, the stifled weeping of women, and the terrified crying of children; while now and then another mighty crash would swing round all heads towards Atlanta.

From all four corners now it spouted flame, and showers of sparks blew out from it on the north wind. Looking back on it, Frank saw it full of fiery eyes, the windows of the burning houses glaring through the darkness. One house he saw blazing away from every window, with the flames spraying up from its roof, till suddenly with a roar this thing which had once been a human dwelling seemed to fly away into the air, hang there for a moment glowing and suspended, then fall in a dust of sparks and soot.

§ 40

The next few days were full of anxiety, as Frank woke out of the torpor in which the shock and chaos of the retreat had mercifully plunged him, and by the time Hood had reached Macdonagh his mind was racked with thoughts of Lorena in her forsaken plight, and conjectures as to what had happened at Maplehead. The Confederate troops soon heard that on the morning after they left it, the Army of the Cumberland had marched into Atlanta, while the Army of Tennessee was stationed at East Point, and the Army of Ohio at Decatur. These three armies thus marked the points of a huge triangle, in the midst of which was Maplehead. Some little time ago he had congratulated himself on

the miles which lay between the town and the plantation, but now he shuddered to think of its remoteness among the chestnut hills, its lonely exposure to any pillaging band of Yankees—licensed to drive off all cattle, and take any furniture or stores they fancied—or worse still, to some gang of negroes, drunken and swollen with emancipation.

He thought of her listening to the thunder of burning and exploding Atlanta, watching the glare of flames in the sky, praying and weeping over her joined hands for the lover in that hell beyond the woods. Then, the next day, the awful news had come out to Maplehead—it was even possible that soldiers had been billeted there. He almost hoped they had been, for at least their presence would protect the women from guerillas. But it was not likely that so remote a place would be chosen as a billet. He wrote to her, urging her at all risks to follow Hood's army to Lovejoy's Station, as so many civilians had done—but he had not the means of posting the letter.

The retreat continued southward from Macdonagh, the army tearing up the rails behind it as it advanced. Atlanta, both by rail and wire, was now entirely cut off. Zollicoffer tried to reassure his friend, but even his sturdy spirits were failing under this climax of catastrophe. It would seem as if for the first time he realised the possibility of the South being beaten—though he never spoke of his fears. His confidential fluency had been dried up, and he would spend whole days in silence, except for such words as his duties demanded. Rainger knew what he was thinking of, what had straightened the crooked line of his joking mouth, and sometimes he reproached himself because the uppermost thought in his own heart was not the plight of Dixie, but the plight of the woman he had left behind.

The morning after the day on which Frank was to have married Lorena the main body of the Confederate army reached Lovejoy's Station. Their advance had been delayed by a halt to fortify Macdonagh, and also by the necessity of destroying the Macon railway behind them. On that day a detachment commanded by Zollicoffer, with

Frank second in command, was sent to tear up the line at Rough-and-Ready.

" We'll see if we can't make a better job of it than those coons did at Drinking Horn. They say the Yankees had the place straight in a couple of hours. But we haven't the time nor the men nor the gunpowder, so it'll be a hard row to hoe."

They set to work, having marked out three miles for destruction, for, as Zollicoffer said, it was better to chaw up the line entirely for a short way than merely spoil it for twice the distance. The men worked with a will, but they were poorly equipped with tools, and railway lines are hard stuff. By means of their big crowbars they managed to twist the rails apart and drag them together, and the ties were soon ablaze, spreading the fire to the bush that edged the track. Then one or two big gaps were blown with charges, and stuffed with rocks and trunks of trees, though the Confederates lacked the Yankee improvement of torpedoes, to explode when the breakdown gangs tried to repair the damage.

The men were exhausted, for the work was bone-breaking, with its handling of heavy crowbars, carting up of stones, and rolling up of logs. Zollicoffer was about to cry a halt, when a sentry he had placed out in the bush gave the alarm of approaching troops.

" That must be our men," said the Lieutenant ; " we'll get them to give us a hand with this little sewing-bee. Hi ! What fool's that ? "—as a shot cracked out, followed by another.

" Perhaps they're Yankees."

" Not they—it's Porter's Texans. Can't you see the Lone Star Flag ? "

" They take us for Yankees, then. My God ! "

A bullet sang over his shoulder, and a man behind him dropped.

Pete raised his hands to his mouth and bawled—

" Stop, you fools ! Can't you see we're the 6th Mississippi, Confederate——"

He suddenly crumpled up, and fell at Frank's feet. At

the same moment a little gang of rather scared-looking soldiers came pushing through the scrub.

"We've made a mistake," said their officer; "we thought you were Yankees, We're supposed to be looking out for them on the line."

A sudden furious irony sent the blood to Frank's face, as he bent over Zollicoffer—

"Don't mention it—you've only killed two of us."

The Texan officer mopped his forehead, and his mouth worked.

"Are they dead?" he asked, when he could drive out the words.

"No!" came from the doubled-up form of Zollicoffer, so loud and unexpected that every one started.

The little party of Texans drew near, and one who had been a doctor at Galveston came up to the lieutenant and tried to turn him over on his back. Frank stood motionless, with his hand up to his throat. He felt as if he were choking.

There was a lot of blood under Zollicoffer; he was shot through the lungs.

"Get some boughs, you men, and make a hurdle," said the doctor; "we must take him into the city. I've got no dressings here."

"Water," said the wounded man, in a fainter voice than that in which he had proclaimed he was not dead.

Two soldiers went off to fetch some, and Pete lay with his eyes shut, while a livid green tint crept over his cheeks. Frank thought he was dead, so did the men when they came back with the water. But when they raised him, he opened his eyes and said faintly but distinctly—

"You pumpkin-headed, pop-eyed potwallopers!"

Then his head fell back on Frank's arm, the blood running out of the corners of his mouth.

§ 41

"O Lord!" cried the Texas captain. "O Lord!"

Frank turned on him, shaking with a fury which seemed almost to stop his breath.

" It is indeed ' O Lord ! ' Who but ' O Lord ' can help a fool like you who doesn't know North from South ? "

" It was in the distance—through the trees ; and we'd been told to look out for Yanks on the rail near Rough-and-Ready."

" You didn't look—you fired. You blazed away because you were too scared to reconnoitre."

" Well, don't let's have any bad blood over it, anyway," said a Texan. " The officer's dead, and we'd better bury him."

Frank said nothing more ; his fury had as suddenly cooled as come. With hanging head he stood staring down at the dead Zollicoffer. He scarcely seemed to notice when the men brought up the spades with which they had been digging on the line. It was a hasty burial, that burial at Rough-and-Ready, but no one had any time to spare, nor could afford the burden of a dead man to Lovejoy's Station. Pete must be buried in the stony earth beside the railroad he had set out to destroy, and every Yankee train that rumbled over the repaired line would shake his bones.

There were no prayers for Zollicoffer, as there had been for Tom Coalbran. The Texans were not a prayerful lot, and besides, just as they were shovelling the earth over him, once again shots cracked out in the bush, and some one shouted—

" It's really them this time ! "

The Yankees had seen from a distant knob the group of men busy on and about the line, and had crept up round them through the bush on both sides of the rail. The Confederate sentries did not see them till they were surrounded and called upon to surrender.

There was no surrender. Forming themselves into a ring, the Texans and Mississippians knelt and fired at the enemy running out of the wood. Several men fell, but others rushed on, and others came tearing after them. The wood vomited out blue-coats upon the little knot of grey-coats on the line. Then Frank felt something hot and sharp go through his rifle-arm, which immediately fell to his side.

For a moment he knelt stupidly without his rifle, staring at it as it lay on the ground. Then suddenly he swayed and fell sideways. Nothing seemed to matter except his arm, which had grown very big, twice as thick as his trunk, but he could not touch it because he could not move, nor see it because of a ridiculous fiery penny which whirled in front of his eyes.

Then he became conscious of feet flying over him—he could see them through the wheelings of the fiery penny, and he could feel them now and then kicking nastily into his ribs. Then suddenly one crashed down on him, the fiery penny leaped, whirled, blazed, and was gone. A great darkness fell.

§ 42

When he came to himself, the fiery penny had returned. It revolved maddeningly before him as he picked himself up and tried to take in his surroundings. He had been lying on a heap of dead men, and the ground was covered with rags, spent cartridges, service caps, and bottles—it was extraordinary how there could never be a battle-field without bottles.

The Yankees had either been driven off—which was unlikely—or had feared an attack if they stayed to consolidate their victory, for the place was deserted. Close by lay the railroad, all covered with mangled rails and heaps of stones. Frank felt sick and giddy, staggered, and thought of lying down again. Perhaps some one would come back to bury the dead. But he realised that it was more likely that the Yankees would return in force to repair the line, and that he had better make tracks unless he wanted to find himself their prisoner.

He stumbled off into the bush, with no very clear idea of where he was going. There was not a sign of either the Texas or the Mississippi men. He had evidently been left for dead. Perhaps news of his death would travel to Lorena . . . but he saw at once that this was a stupid thought. Lorena was as ignorant of his fate as he was of hers. He

wondered how many miles it was to Maplehead ; it would be blessed indeed to have her bind up his arm, and lay her cool fingers against his forehead, and charm him through a long, lazy convalescence, as she had done five months ago. . . . That was another stupid thought, for Lorena lived now in the midst of the Yankees, and he could not stay at her house.

He had better rejoin his regiment at Lovejoy's Station—his arm was broken and he had been kicked on the side of the head ; it would be good to lie up for a while in hospital, to stare at a cool white ceiling from a cool white cot. But it was probable that in a day or two the army would leave Lovejoy's in its endless retreat, and he would either be left behind to fall into Uncle Sam's clutches, or be carried on with the troops, in a jolting, lurching, mule-jogged wagon, which would roll from side to side in the ruts and bumps on the stones—he had often heard wounded men scream as they drove in the wagons.

He still stumbled on through the bush. After all, the simplest course seemed to be to walk till he came to a house, or dropped. He wished that damned penny would go—it got between him and everything he looked at. His skull felt as if it was made of lead, which the sun was scorching to red-heat. He realised that he had lost his hat, and though the scrub protected him to a certain extent from the September furnace, it was not so tall or so thick but that furious rays occasionally oozed through the branches, laying stripes of torture on Frank's head, in spite of its thick mat of hair.

If only he could find a house . . . a bed. It was stupid trying to walk with a broken arm, he kept on hitting it against boughs, and the agony made him all sweaty and weak. Had he walked a dozen miles . . . or one ? He now had an idea that he was going to Maplehead. No one but Lorena could cure the terrible ache in his temples. He must tell her about Zollicoffer, too—poor Zollicoffer, who was buried at Rough-and-Ready in the Palmetto flag . . . no, that was Tom on Three Sergeants Hill—he was mixing up

his graves. How long would it take him to get to Maplehead ? It would be sweet to lie in that big soft bed with the flowered curtains and watch the shadow of the magnolia flutter on the floor . . . if he could watch anything with this confounded wheel before his eyes. It was worse than ever now—throwing out sparks. He tried to catch it, and once he thought he had knocked it down, for he saw it at his feet, lying on a stone. He stamped on it savagely, but it was no use, for when he lifted his eyes he saw it twirling serenely as ever against the hot blue sky.

But beyond it he was almost certain that he saw the smoke of a chimney—yes, that was a house. He would go in, and perhaps they would give him a drink. It looked a poor house, but it hid a little patch of maize behind it, and an orchard. The orchard looked so cool and inviting—all tossed in the wind, and soft shadows rushing over it—that he thought of going to lie there, instead of in the house. But he was thirsty, horribly thirsty, so he knocked at the door.

It was opened by a mulatto woman, and looking over her shoulder, Frank saw that the room was full of soldiers—Dixie men, some sitting on benches, some lying on the floor. The woman did not seem surprised, or to require any explanation beyond a few words he stammered. She bade him come in, and had soon brought him a jug of fern-tasting water, which he drank at a draught. Then he laid his head against the corner of the settle, his broken arm dangling forlornly by his side, and fell asleep.

When he woke it was dusk, and the room was less crowded. Two men were playing poker, one was eating, and two more were asleep. The man who was eating put down his plate, after carefully licking his fingers.

" Say, stranger, I guess that arm of yours is broke."

" I guess it is. I was in a skirmish at Rough-and-Ready."

" There was some chaps here an hour ago that were in it too—Texans—they've gone now."

" Have they gone to Lovejoy's Station ? "

"No—they're making tracks for Alabama, to git way back to their homes. This jig is up, you know."

"The war?" . . .

"Sure. We're flatting out all round. Poor old Dixie! Wal, we'd have won right enough if we'd had the dollars and the guns. I shan't wait for the bust—I'm off for the coast to-morrow, and I'll ship fur Nassau. Like to come with me?"

"I guess I'll stay and see it out."

"But you can't fight with that arm."

"I've got friends in this country, and I can't leave them."

"Where are they?"

"Near Atlanta."

The other man whistled.

"You'd best git them out o' that."

"I will—I'm going to them now."

The man whistled again.

"I'm no more use as a fighter," continued Frank. "While I could fight I had to stick on fighting, but now I'm just a casualty—they'd put me in a mule-wagon and drag me after them . . . I'm no use to them, so I'm going back to the folk I can still be of use to."

"I calculate you know the Yankees are between here and Atlanta."

"I don't care—this won't be the first time I've gone through their lines."

The soldier spat reflectively.

"Wal, I guess you'll do as you like. But even if your do git through to Atlanta, I don't see how you're gwine to git your friends away. I tell you the Yanks are sitting on the place. But that ain't no concern of mine. I'd have my arm set fust, though, if I wuz you."

"Where can I get a doctor?"

"I don't know as you can git a doctor anywhere but this feller here"—pointing to one of the sleeping men—"is an uncommon good veterinary. He'd set your arm fur you and strap it up, as fine as any doc."

§ 43

That night Frank slept on the floor, and the next morning had his arm set by the vet. It was a painful job, and he had his doubts as to its success ; but the veterinary had none, and the arm was strapped to Ranger's side and pronounced half-way to recovery.

He did not leave the cottage till evening, for he thought he would be better to walk in the swale. The penny now gave only occasional performances, and it was black. Frank's leathery constitution, hardened by the roughness of war, was able to endure these knocks, in spite of the fact that he had been only four months recovered from his Chattanooga wound. The woman of the house begged him to stay another night, as she could see he was still sick and feverish, but he insisted on leaving, and walked rather stiffly off at dusk, after a supper of corn-bread and catnip tea. He was given some bread to carry with him, and also a good stick cut from the orchard. He lost his rifle at Rough-and-Ready, but he could not have used it, and its weight would have been an encumbrance.

The men at the house had told him that it would take him a couple of days' brisk walking to reach Atlanta. Therefore he would be lucky if he made it in three, for not only was his pace much reduced by weakness, but he had to go very carefully for fear of the Yankees who were scouring the district for Confederate guerillas and bushwackers.

He walked only by night. During the day he lay in some sheltered hole and slept intermittently, after a suck of corn-bread and long drinks of water. At night he tramped under a huge pale moon, which made his adventure almost as unsafe as by day. He guided his progress by her, and by the stars, for the scrub was not very high ; but the stars were still strange to his northern eyes, and set him sometimes on erring roads, where he might have gone far astray but for help from squatters in the bush, who also warned him more than once of approaching Yankees.

He had one or two narrow escapes. Once in the cold raking moonlight he lay huddled into a pokeberry bush, while a whole Yankee regiment marched by, singing "John Brown's Body." The moon shone on their white thirsty bayonets, on their glittering buckles and polished buttons, and he saw with envy that many of them were smoking—good cigars and pipes, the exquisite flavour of which curled softly on the night air and tickled the nostrils and throat of the poor man who had been without tobacco for a week. Those who were not smoking sang—

"John Brown's knapsack is strapped on his back,
John Brown's knapsack is strapped on his back,
John Brown's knapsack is strapped on his back,
As his soul goes marching on.

He's gone to be a soldier in the Army of the Lord,
He's gone to be a soldier in the Army of the Lord,
He's gone to be a soldier in the Army of the Lord,
And his soul goes marching on.

And John Brown's Army goes marching along,
And John Brown's Army goes marching along" . . .

—till the voices, purged and etherealised by distance, melted into the hush of the night.

For the first two days the country was all grown over with oak-barrens and scrub, but towards the middle of the third day he came to the chestnut hills he knew, and on the morning of the fourth he stood on one of them looking down into the valley of the Chattahoochee, where Atlanta lay black and broken.

The morning was clear. Little scuds of cloud moved over a gracious blue sky, into which some of the mellowness of September had crept, so that it no longer seemed to ache with wind and heat. There was no wind in the valley. but it was as clear as the sky. He could see the smashed and twisted remains of the West Point, the Macon, and the Georgia Central Railways, like trodden worms with little ant-like swarms moving over them, mending them for the little toy trains that were bunched smokeless in the dépôt at Atlanta. The town itself was quite distinct—he could

see it lying there empty and charred, a hideous scar in that beautiful green valley of the chestnut woods, with the Stars and Stripes hanging limply from its staff on the Capitol, like a vulture brooding over the dead.

Frank could not see the chimneys of Maplehead, and was not quite sure of his bearings—he had never looked down like this on the valley before. There were the ruins of a farm a couple of miles off down the slope, but not far from it was a planter's house to all appearance safe and inhabited, with dots of sheep and cows in the cattle-park. Northward, beyond the city, he could see the Yankee line on the Chattahoochee—the white tents, and the brown scars of the field-works. Southward there seemed to be no camp. Perhaps, then, Maplehead had still had nothing of the war but noise. . . . But it was really impossible for him to tell from a distance. Perhaps it was lying in a black heap round its tall chimney, like this farm near at hand. Perhaps Lorena and her mother had left—perhaps they were in search of him. Perhaps, like so many of the citizens of Atlanta, they had followed the army to Lovejoy's Station. They might be there now—fifty miles behind him. He had never thought of that before. Now he realised that he might have done better if he had rejoined his regiment at Lovejoy's, and let the army which had been the cause of his wound take upon itself the cure of it—shown himself more British and less American in his ideas of military service.

§ 44

He walked down into the valley, following a grassy track aslant the hill. Soon he was plunged deep in the chestnut woods, the corn-scented glare of the open country was gone, behind the deep green drooping leaves. The chestnuts looked tired—they seemed to hang their leaves wearily in the heat, and the rims were curled and brown. Frank knew that at home this portended the autumn would be dingy; the leaves, wilted by August dusts, scarcely survived into October reds. Probably this autumn round

Atlanta would be brown, for sultry heats and thundery unrefreshing rains had beaten on the chestnut trees through August and September; and always there had been that miasma of powder and burning, the drift of foul chemicals through the woods, poisoning their beauty and life.

He was still uncertain of the way to Maplehead, and he met no one of whom to ask it. At last he came quite unexpectedly on a small farm he and Lorena had occasionally passed on their walks, and from that he was able to orient his way. Gordon's Creek Farm looked peaceful and unmolested—it had never been very fatly stocked, but shocks of reaped maize stood in the field, and one or two rather aged cows dozed by the creek. No one was about—at all events Frank did not see the Yankee soldiers grooming their horses in the stable.

Two miles further on he came to the entrance of Maplehead, and here he had his first qualm, for the big wooden gateway had been wrenched off its hinges and lay broken in the ditch. The house was not visible from the road, and Frank had to walk about thirty yards up the avenue before he could see it. At first he thought it was undamaged—the grass in front of it had been recently cut, and he could see the flower-beds glowing at the sides. But as he drew nearer he saw that the yellow walls were faintly smoked, as if by some partial fire, and the big end chimney was quite black, with frizzled creepers hanging from it. His heart throbbed and sickened. So they had been there—Sherman's ruffians! It had fallen into their scheme of destruction and terrorisation. They had burnt and sacked Maplehead.

He ran shufflingly towards it. As sometimes happened to him in great crises of agony, his mind was fairly calm. Emotion seemed to stifle it—it absolutely refused to picture for him what Lorena must have suffered when she saw her house attacked and plundered, and herself and her mother driven out—where? Perhaps they had not been driven out, they might still be there in the shell of their home. He called faintly as he ran. His body was far more dis-

tressed than his mind; wounded and weak, it responded more readily to the anguish within. His breath almost failed him—it seemed as if he could never reach the door. He did not think of any lurking Yankees there might still be about. He thought of nothing very clearly.

The front door had been broken down and flung across the threshold. He stepped over it into the entrance hall, and even then he felt the welcome of the coolness and the shade, of the spirit of Maplehead. But it was a spirit haunting a dead body. The doors of the surrounding rooms were open, and he saw that within them the furniture was lying about all smashed. He went into the parlour. The floor was strewn with piano keys, and the piano looked as if it had been chopped with an axe. The carpet had been pulled up and torn to shreds, the cushions and chair seats ripped open and their stuffing dragged out—fluff and feathers still whirled in every occasional gust that blew through the gaping window. The chairs, sofas, and tables had been broken up like firewood, pictures had been torn out of their frames, drawers hung open with their contents rummaged and scattered. The sheer uselessness, the stupid frenzy, the bestiality of the destruction sickened Frank.

He hurried from the room and went into the dining parlour. To his surprise he found it untouched. This, and the incomplete damage of the fire, convinced him that the soldiers had been either called or frightened off in the midst of their work. He went out into the hall again, and shouted. There was no answer. Of course no one was there. It was even possible that Lorena and her mother had left before the attack. He hoped so. Where were they? He might go and ask the people at the farm. Did they know anything of this?

Then suddenly he grew quite cold, and stood quite stiff, staring in front of him at the foot of the stairs. There, in the shadow, lay a dead negro soldier.

At once the situation had changed from one of ordinary horror to one of impossible ghastliness. That Maplehead

should be plundered and burnt by Yankee troops was terrible, but it was endurable to the extent that the women in it would have been fairly safe. They might have been forced to see their home destroyed, their cattle and slaves driven off, their fortunes ruined, but their persons would not have been molested. But niggers——

Of course he ought to have known—that senseless, childish, bestial destruction, that holocaust of good with bad, nothing of value taken, merely destroyed. . . . He might have guessed. That was not the way Yankee troops would have gone to work—Sherman's experienced looters. He had heard that there was a battalion of negro pioneers with each regiment—it was possible, too, that one of the new coloured regiments had come up from Chattanooga . . . darkies dressed up like monkeys in Federal uniforms, and fighting like monkeys with bites and scratches and kicks. . . .

A quite new set of fears was on him. His blood thickened, and his heart beat in giddy irregular leaps. He did not look close at the negro, or pause to see how he had come by his death, but turned and ran upstairs. The stairs had been charred by the fire, and once his foot crashed right through the papery wood, and he fell. But he pulled himself up again, and ran on with his wrenched ankle. The fear in him was so terrible that he could hardly endure the seconds that must elapse before he could either confirm or scatter it. The fear was, that Lorena and her mother were still in the house.

He ran down the passage to their bedrooms, past the door of the room where he had once slept—without looking in at the mass of furniture and rags, all snowed over with the feathers from the mattress. He could see that the door of Mrs. Middleton's bedroom had been broken in ; but the passage was dark and it was not till he nearly reached it that he saw the body of old Shirley lying on the threshold. In his hand he held the remains of a burst flintlock, with which no doubt he had tried to defend his Missies.

Frank's heart had ceased to leap and thump. Indeed he

could not feel it beat at all. He went quite calmly into the room, which he saw had been senselessly rifled and damaged like the parlour. Women's clothes were flung about the floor—dresses, petticoats, and stays. The curtains had been torn down and the window broken.

On the bed in the alcove lay Lorena and her mother. They looked as if they were asleep, but he knew they were not. The mother was in her nightgown, Lorena fully dressed and lying outside the bed. He went over and looked down at them. The mother bore no signs of injury —she had evidently died from fright and shock ; but there was a little wound with burnt edges under Lorena's hair on her temple, and a pistol of clumsy ancient make lay under her hand on the bed. They had probably been dead a couple of days, the negroes had not touched them, possibly for superstitious reasons, possibly because here they had received whatever scare it was that drove them from their unfinished work.

The heart in his breast seemed as still as the heart in hers, as he stooped down and touched her, and found her cold. On her face was neither dread nor horror, though she must have felt both before she took the course that her honour and her love for him demanded. Both women looked strangely peaceful and expressionless ; the faint little smile of the dead was on their lips, and the shadow of the magnolia tree moved over them.

§ 45

Private Hiram Dakin, of the 45th Pennsylvania Regiment, was marching down the hill to fill his kettle at Gordon's Creek. He had been working all the morning at Gordon's Creek Farm, reaping their grain, carting their hay and branding their cattle with a big U.S.—an unpleasant job for a godly man, except when he remembered that the Word of the Lord had bidden the children of Israel destroy the Amalekites root and branch, even to their women and little children. At all events the Union army spared the women and little children, though how they

would live when everything else was gone was sometimes a problem that troubled the nights of Hiram Dakin.

He had just reached the bottom of the hill, where the creek flows, when he suddenly caught sight of a man running towards him from the direction of Atlanta. The man was hatless and covered with dust, and it was not till he was quite close to him that Dakin saw he was a Confederate soldier.

"Hands up!" he shouted, swinging round his rifle, so that his kettle, which hung in unsoldierly fashion from the end of it, clattered off into the ditch.

But the Confederate took no manner of notice, he rushed straight at Dakin, seized his arm, and stood there trembling.

"Landsakes!" said the New Englander, for the moment quite unable to tackle this unmilitary situation.

"Help me," said the Confederate, and seemed to choke. "Help me."

He was a much older man than Dakin, and a bigger man, too, heavily built and strong, but one arm was broken and strapped to his side. His face and hair were covered with dust. He stood leaning against Dakin, panting and coughing. It struck the latter that the fellow had no idea he was clutching a Federal soldier. He must be mad.

"Say, you're my prisoner," he exclaimed at last.

Still the Confederate did not speak, then he said feebly—

"Come with me first."

"Come where?"

"To Maplehead."

"Maplehead!—that's the place we're to clear out to-morrow."

"It's been cleared out already, and the women murdered." . . .

"Landsakes!"

"The niggers murdered them. Come and see them."

"I don't want to," cried Dakin, suddenly overwhelmed by the rather horrible strangeness of all this. "You're my prisoner. Come along with me to Gordon's Creek, and the boys there will go and see what's happened."

The Confederate still clutched him frenziedly with his one arm.

"No, you're to come with me. I must go back . . . I must see her again. I'll go with you where you like afterwards, but I must see her again."

Dakin found himself being dragged along by his prisoner, and realising that the man was unarmed, wounded, and in those last mysterious straits of human despair which the Lord of his Book had shared and blessed, he threw off his doubts and went with him. After all, he might as well see what had happened. Those niggers again, he supposed. . . . Of course they were his brothers in the Lord, but . . . he had an uneasy feeling that it would have been better if those younger brothers had been left a little longer in the nursery.

So the Yankee and the Dixie man went together to Maplehead. They walked arm in arm, for the Dixie man could not walk alone. But his voice was now perfectly calm. He told Dakin quietly, if rather faintly, all that had happened to him—how he had come to Maplehead from Rough-and-Ready, where he had been wounded and his friend killed, to find his sweetheart and bring her away out of the dangers of Atlanta; and how he had found the house sacked by niggers, and his girl and her mother lying dead.

"She took her own life—it was what I should have expected of her. She always had courage, though she looked so fine and delicate. She once tramped all the way from Vicksburg to Jackson, through the forest." . . .

The negroes had evidently entered Maplehead from the back, for when Frank and Hiram Dakin approached it from that direction they found the garden all trampled, and saw that it was in the kitchen premises that the fire had started. Frank had scarcely noticed anything when an hour ago he had rushed blindly out of the house, conscious of nothing but the need of a human creature's contact to save him from madness. Now he saw that the kitchen had been gutted by fire, and the store-room next it; and here they found the body of poor old Mammy Dinah with one

of her own carving-knives in her breast. The young girl Chloe had disappeared—perhaps the invaders had taken her off with them.

They went straight upstairs, and into the room where the two women lay in their strange peace. War had been unable to harden Dakin's soft, kindly heart, and when he saw them lying there like flowers thrown to wither, he began to cry.

"Don't!" said Frank—he himself had not shed a tear.

Dakin knelt down by the bed, and said a prayer—not for the dead, for that was considered heretical in Salem Church, Bakerville, Pa. He prayed partly for the living man whose shadow lay over the faces of the dead, and he prayed partly a wild jumble of petitions and ejaculations, with texts of Scripture that grew more and more meaningless and inappropriate. After a time Frank touched his shoulder.

"Look here, I don't want to disturb you, but I'll be grateful if you will help me bury them before you take me back to Gordon's Creek."

Dakin rose from his knees.

"I guess we'd better go and fetch the boys."

"No—if you fetch the boys, I'll be marched off at once; and I must bury her myself. It's the last I can do for her. No one must do it but me—though I shall want you to help me, as I've only one arm. What's the use of fetching anybody? This is quite a common thing that has happened. There won't be a coroner's inquest—this isn't peace-time, you know. There won't be any church funeral—the parson's gone from Atlanta, and the church has tumbled into the churchyard."

Hiram Dakin wished that the Southerner would not talk in this quiet matter-of-fact voice—it upset him more than his earlier frenzy, for it gave him a deeper impression of despair. He stood a little in awe of his prisoner. There had always been something awe-inspiring about suffering to his simple mind, which had known no worse hour than that in which he took his mother in his arms and wished her a long good-bye, when the boys were singing—

"We're bound for the happy land of Canaan."

He went with Frank into the garden, and in a bed of sweet olive and verbena, against the wall, watched by a cinnamon tree, he dug a grave. It took him most of the afternoon, for Rainger could give very little help, and the long shadows of the persimmons were running over the garden from the avenue when he and Frank carried out the mother and daughter, with sheets from their bed for their grave-clothes. He had often taken part in these clumsy burials—fully dressed men rolled up in their blankets and hastily smothered with a few spadefuls of earth. But with women it seemed different with Hiram Dakin—their last bed was too rough for this delicate pair. The way Lorena's hair hung over Frank shoulder as he carried her down on his one sound arm—allowing Dakin only to touch her feet—filled him with a useless and horrible pity.

At last it was over—as decent a funeral as they could make it, with these two lying side by side, the flowered coverlet of their bed laid over them, their eyes closed, their hands folded, four feet of earth between Lorena and her lover's grief. Frank collapsed against the wall as soon as the earth was trodden down; he was worn out by his small share of the digging and his large share of the lifting and carrying. But Dakin was invigorated by the exercise, and his emotion had waxed into a godly headiness. He told Frank that they could not leave the dead without a prayer, and offered up several, standing beside the grave, very tall, his chin up, his service cap held devotionally against his stomach.

Frank sat and watched him patiently, hearing nothing but an inchoate babble of sound, which seemed to lose its small sense in the heavy drumming of his ears. His head ached, and the fiery penny had come back; he saw it whirling on Dakin's boots, his good Union boots now richly caked with Dixie clay. He wished the Yankee would stop his prayers and take him away to Gordon's Creek. But the Spirit of the Lord had moved Dakin, and he testified unto the Lord as they testified in Salem. All the misery

and violence he had witnessed had spiritually crazed him, he was reacting from his pity and his pain, and his body was exalted by its health, so standing there in the swale, under the shaking cinnamon tree, with the dusk wind puffing up from the creek and running with the shadows over the lawn, he testified to Frank of the goodness of God. . . .

"My brother, see here—the Lord is good. I guess His mercy is from everlastin'. He has put His spirit into us, and it says 'Father.' The angel of the Lord camps around them that fear Him, so don't you iver git skeered of the works of Satan, and of niggers which are the Lord's children same as us, though Beelzebub may have got 'em fur a time. Behold, no evil thing shall hurt His elect—that's us—and if they eat any poisonous thing it shall not hurt them. There was a man in Johnson City ate sassafras root till he was sick unto death, and the angel of the Lord raised him up after his relations had taken the cars from Pottsville for the funeral. Fur look how high the heaven is from the earth—so fur hath He set our sins from us. Oh, my brother, if you will believe, and not harden your heart, your sins will be washed away in the blood of Jesus. Fur I guess you've sinned, or all this wouldn't have come upon you. But whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, so I reckon He loves you everlastin' well."

Frank sat under the wall and stared at him, half drugged by his sound, and fascinated by the unwieldly bulk of him, standing in that trampled flower-bed, with head thrown back and arms swung up to heaven, like Farmer Hayseed at a Camp Meeting. His coat was off, and his bare arms were grown with a reddish stubble, his braces strained over his shirt, unbuttoned to give play to his big chest, and his throat was a boy's throat, scraggy and not unbeautiful.

"O Lord, Thou art good, Thou givest us richly all things to enjoy. Thou didst make heaven and earth and the sea and the round world and all that therein is, also the stony rocks for the coneys. Thou sayest unto us—'Rejoice, O young man, rejoice in thy youth!' If trouble seems to come upon us and the world has gotten all mussed

up, as it no doubt seems, O Lord, to this brother here, that is only another way of showing Thy goodness, O Lord. Who is this that comes from Bozrah with dyed garments? I guess it is this brother here. Why is he red in his apparel, and his feet as one who treadeth the wine-press? That Thy Name may be glorified and Thy ways known unto men. I guess Thou wantest to show him his evil ways, fighting for slavery and secession, so Thou hast smitten him—but in love. Thou smitest only in love, for Thou art good, and Thou art Love, O Lord." . . .

He did not stop till a sudden cold buffet of wind blew the year's first dead leaves over him. Then he started, for he saw that the sky was brimmed with dusk, and the garden had become a mystery of shadows and blots of bushes. He also saw that his prisoner and congregation had fallen in a huddle against the wall where the day's heat still lingered, and that he was sound asleep.

§ 46

When Frank opened his eyes again he had travelled very far from that scented, fluttering garden of burial. From his sleep he passed into stupor, from stupor into delirium, and when at last he came to himself he was in the big Union hospital at Decatur, lapped once more in cleanliness and whiteness. His first thought was, that he was still in hospital at Dalton, and that the whole of the last six months was part of the dream which still hung like a shadow over his mind. His visit to Maplehead, his love of Lorena, that dragged-out retreat over the hills to Atlanta, that nightmare flight from the burning city, Zollicoffer's death beside the railroad, and that return to Maplehead which ended in the burial of all in him that was manlike and alive—all this was only a part of those aching wanderings of his spirit down forlorn dusky ways, knockings, and callings, strugglings and wailings, fires that burnt through his bones and the mange and decay of his soul, till all that was alive of him had dwindled to one tiny spark,

which he watched through the desert of a hundred years, till at last it feebly flickered up into this—into this helpless thing which lay aching on its cot, sucking down spoonfuls of bread-and-milk from a nurse.

It was the nurse who told him he was not at Dalton. She came from Massachusetts, and spoke with a shrill, nasal twang and drawl, such as he had never heard in the South.

"Sure, you're in *De*catur," she said, "and you've been sick a month with cerebral fever."

So it was all true. He had not dreamed the rout of Dixie and Lorena's burial. He was a prisoner of war—not that it mattered, he might just as well be a prisoner now that he would never fight or love again. In utter weakness, he felt the tears roll out of the corners of his eyes, felt the Yankee nurse wipe them away and tell him not to worry but drink up his nice milk.

He seemed to slip from her, to wander in the lost country of love and freedom. His mind, visionary with fever, was unable to conceive a thought without presenting it in phantasmagoria. He was thinking of Maplehead, so he saw Maplehead, swimming in the soft afternoon heat, as he had first seen it in May. He knew that by fixing his mind on it so, he could keep it beautiful and sunny and unassailed, but the moment he let, as it were, his mind slip, the picture changed, and Maplehead stood there in all its desolation of broken windows, singed creepers, and smoky walls. It was a pity, because it meant he could never see Lorena—for directly he began to picture her coming out of the porch, as she had come that first evening with the breeze in her hair and the sunset in her eyes, and her heliotrope skirts like clouds round her darling feet—then the wild leap and ecstasy of his thoughts at once translated him to the grimed and ravished Maplehead and the trodden garden, where he and a text-blown Yankee private dug a grave for the ladies in the garden. . . .

He tried to hear her, since he could not see her, tried to bring her sweet voice down to him, by waking in his

mind echoes of her piano, softly tinkling out the first bars of her song. . . . It had begun—

"The years creep slowly by, Lorena,
The snow is on the grass again."

But that was not her voice singing, feeble, cracked, wheezy like broken bellows. Heavens! It was his own; the men in the other beds were groaning and sitting upon their elbows, and the Massachusetts nurse was running up to tell him to lie quiet and not disturb the others.

After a time, as he grew better, his mental processes became more simple. Directly he thought of a thing he did not always see it before him, he was able to pick out of his surroundings that which was real and that which was illusory, and in time the phantasmagoria ceased. He no longer was a partly super-human partly sub-human being, he was just a plain sick man, going through the day's routine of washing and feeding and dressing. His head was getting better, and so was his arm, though the latter had been so badly set by the vet. that the Yankee surgeon told him he would probably never have the full use of it. He did not much mind. A man may just as well have one arm as two, he thought.

They were very kind to him, doctors and nurses. All the other men in the ward were Yankees, but they were kind too, and if Northern women ever came to visit the sick and bring them flowers and tobacco, they did not pass Frank over because he was a rebel. He had all sorts of luxuries he had never had in a Southern hospital—meat, and tea, and now and then a glass of wine. The Massachusetts nurse was especially kind. She pitied him. She told him that a man of his age had no business fighting, and it was a good thing he would see no more of it. It was the first time any one had ever spoken of "a man of his age," and it made him feel terribly old. And of course he was growing old now that he no longer had Lorena to keep him young—if he had not lost Lorena he would have been young always.

Sometimes he would play poker with the man in the

bed next to him; a table would be put between them and they would play. Sometimes there would be a concert in the ward, and the men would sing their new song, "Marching through Georgia," or the "Battle Hymn of the Republic"—

"Mine eyes have seen the coming of the Glory of the Lord;
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword:
His truth is marching on."

One man from Wisconsin played most beautifully on the fiddle, and another from Connecticut did wonderful and laughable conjuring tricks.

Thus the days passed tolerably enough. It was only the nights that were dreadful. He would always wake at the same hour, when the big clock on the Court House at Decatur was chiming two, and the ward would be in darkness save for one little nightlight, and the men all asleep, some quietly, some noisily. Then he would lie till morning and think with a horrible mechanical clearness which had seldom attended his thoughts before. He seemed to see the plan of the world, the Wheel, the grinding order of life. He no longer felt that he was part of a muddled dream, dreamed by a muddled God. Life was nothing so comfortable as a dream. There was Purpose in its ghastliness. He came with growing conviction to see himself not as a figment or a flame, but something which had its definite unhappy part to play. He saw the God of this world as a great curious greedy power, grabbing at matter, grabbing at experience. He saw Him feeding on the sin and pain of mankind as on the blood and smoke of a sacrifice. Every human twinge and throe brought the Great Unknowing nearer to its Knowledge. God was realising Himself through man, gaining experience through him. And he, with all his hope and pain and purpose, was just the hand that God thrust into the fire, that He might know burning; and as the pain of a burnt hand is not in the hand but in the brain which informs it, so even Frank's

pain and passion were not his own, but belonged to the Eternal Brain which decreed them—which felt and learned through him, and through him would grow and fulfil itself, and know and be, though he himself were consumed. . . .

Thus his mind travailed in monstrous births till the face of the Court House clock crept out of the darkness across the street, and the nurse came to prepare him for breakfast.

" Now what have you been thinking about," she would sometimes ask, " to get all of a state like this ? "

" God," he said, and she never questioned him further, but washed his face and told him it was a good thing his fighting days were over—and once, unseen, she kissed him, because, as she told another nurse afterwards, she was sorry for the poor thing, and, sure, he reminded her of her dad.

§ 47

Frank stayed in the hospital till the end of February. He mended slowly, and was for some weeks so exhausted and helpless that the doctor feared phthisical complications—he had not spared his body since the attack of pneumonia which had laid him up all the winter before. His arm, also, had had to be broken again and re-set, and even now it was not a satisfactory job, but a stiff clumsy limb, which he could neither quite straighten nor quite bend.

The Massachusetts nurse was highly indignant when she heard that he was to be taken off to the Prison Camp at Andersonville. What harm could he do to any one, poor old thing, that they should shut him up ? But the system of exchanges had broken down, and men were no longer released on parole. One morning at the end of February, with drifts of rain and sunshine following each other across the yellow spring sky, he said good-bye to the hospital with its clever, sharp-tongued doctors, its poker-playing patients, and its kind little nurse, and was marched off under military escort to the dépôt, where a number of rebel prisoners were waiting to be entrained for Andersonville.

Now Frank felt himself a prisoner again. He had often forgotten it in the hospital—when the man in the next bed

said : " Gee, bub, that's a sucker ! " or his nurse gave him molasses candy which she had had sent her from home, or kind-faced Yankee ladies brought him bloomy grapes and fragrant 'baccy ; but now he stood in a long line of prisoners, guarded by soldiers with fixed bayonets, without candy, without tobacco, waiting for the train which was to take him off to an unknown bondage.

His comrades were for the most part a seedy lot. Here and there a strapping planter stood among them, healthy, sunburnt, sound, and lithe as an Indian. But the majority looked cowed, men lost for a lost cause. They had seen Dixie in her death-throes under the Northern heel, and they knew that their sufferings were not a ransom for her, but part of her piled-up agonies. As he watched them there, slack, despairing, sullen, Frank felt the iron of defeat go into his soul.

Of course in the hospital he had been told of the progress of the Union arms and the South's slow overthrow. He had heard how Sherman had marched through Georgia to Savannah, and was now devouring the Carolinas : how Hood had been beaten at Nashville, and the war-stained, historied army of Tennessee pounded up into scattered, demoralised fragments : how Lee was playing his last game in Virginia : how everywhere the Confederacy was crumbling, its valour, its endurance, its sacrifice, the blood of its sons and the tears of its daughters, all spent and spilled in vain, all thrown out on that great rubbish heap of wasted human effort from which the smoke of dead hopes and useless sacrifices goes up to the God who feeds on our pain and grows wise on our calamities.

But in hospital, comfortable, remote, sheltered as much as might be from the ills due to him as a stricken foe, he had not fully realised his place among the outcasts. Now he bore his share of the shame of the beaten South. The country he had fought and bled for was a country no longer, but a blasted wilderness of fire and blood, without cohesion, strength or hope, waiting for the Northern yoke to be clamped down. He looked at the men lined up there in the faltering sunlight, and he remembered how three years ago

he had stood in the dépôt at Columbia, with all those happy, eager boys, singing " Dixie " in the rain. No one was singing now, except the dapper Yankee guards, though now and then a stubby Georgian with a bandaged head would whistle a few bars of the negro melody, " Uncle Jim." " Dixie " would have stuck in all their throats—land of burnt and trampled cotton, shell-torn cinnamon tree, and sandy bottom dark with blood. . . .

But the guards sang beautifully, standing there in the sunshine with their rifles grounded, their stomachs full of pork and beans, their backs well covered with good blue Union broadcloth—their cause victorious and vindicated throughout the land. To their drooping lines of prisoners they sang the song of freedom—

" Mine eyes have seen the coming of the Glory of the Lord ;
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored ;
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword ;
His truth is marching on.

" I have seen Him in the watch-fires of a hundred circling camps ;
They have builded Him an altar in the evening dews and damps ;
I can read His righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps ;
His day is marching on.

" I have read a fiery gospel writ in burnished rows of steel ;
As you deal with My contemners, so with you My grace shall deal ;
Let the Hero born of woman crush the serpent with His heel ;
Since God is marching on.

" He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat ;
He is sifting out the hearts of men before His Judgment seat ;
Oh ! be swift, my soul, to answer Him ! be jubilant, my feet !
Our God is marching on.

" In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,
With a glory in His bosom that transfigures you and me ;
As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free ;
While God is marching on."

" Amen," drawled the man next to Frank under his breath, " we're mighty pious now we've raked in the persimmons. Oh, Jerusalem ! "

But the beauty of the song made Frank ache, though the men sang it carelessly, to the tune of " John Brown's Body."

It seemed to float with the wistful sunshine, and to deepen the pain of his bondage. He must go to a dreary prison-camp, to be shut away from the spring and the rustling green of the chestnut woods, in some dusty cantonment, where prisoners' feet had trodden away the grass. For the first time he sickened at the thought of captivity—hitherto he had not troubled about it much, one place was as good as another. But now he knew that in spite of his broken body and empty heart there was still enough of him left alive to love the earth and the spring. He still felt that rejoicing of himself in the pale light, that response of his manhood to the vernal promise, which he had felt through more than thirty springs, from his childhood up till now. His heart leaped to discover that there was still so much which the locust had not eaten. But it also groaned, for now he found himself loathing the thought of confinement, seeking to escape from it. He had been happier, perhaps, in his old stupor, before a drench of spring and the voices of young men singing in the sunshine had woke him to the knowledge of desires he had thought dead.

The train rolled into the station and the men were bundled in. They were short of guards—only two to each carriage. Frank was told that if he would give his parole not to escape he would be put in a carriage where there were no guards at all; but he refused, for he now knew that he would certainly escape if he had the chance. But it was not likely he would ever have the chance. As the train drew out of the station he could see that the neighbourhood was buzzing with Yankees—they galloped by on horseback, waving their whips to the train, they marched along the pike in their gay blue coats, they crowded the dépôts, and dotted the line. Escape was hopeless in such a country—he was a fool to think of it. He wished he had never heard that song. Why should such trivial things as a burst of sunshine or a breath of spring or the song of boys be able to change the whole strong drift of a life? In the substantial world causes were in proportion to their effects; but here was he, who had thought himself dead, terribly and tortur-

ingly alive because he had stood for an hour in the sun on a spring evening and heard some young men singing. . . .

Outside Atlanta the train hesitated, shunted, and waited, changing from the Georgia Central to the Macon Railway. The men's tongues were loosed by boredom, and they talked to each other across the carriage, and joked with the guards, who after all were good fellows and Americans too. The inevitable poker-cards appeared, but Frank would not play, though he was considered some " pumpkin " at the game. He was thinking hard, for he had made up his mind.

If only the line was clear of soldiers and the train not going too fast, he felt it would not be impossible for him to drop out on the track and make a bolt for the woods. He carefully studied the fastening of the door, and felt that he could reach over the man next him and open it in an instant. Then he could drop on the line. He had only just come out of hospital, but he knew that he was tough in grain, and he also knew how to fall in such a way as to do himself the least possible injury. Anyhow the risk was worth taking, for the alternatives were freedom or death, and both at that moment seemed preferable to captivity. He knew he was a fool—but he was too deeply stirred by his discovery of a surviving youth in himself not to follow its lead.

The train was now slipping along the Macon railroad at about twenty miles an hour. The carriage was entirely given over to poker and old-sledge, he noticed that the line seemed fairly clear of troops, though the scars of their occupation could be plainly seen all over the burnt and shattered country. A soft wind purred into the carriage and fanned Frank's hot and aching face, and the honey-coloured light moving over the burnt fields seemed to give them back for an hour the glow of their lost beauty.

He looked round at his guards, looked at his fellow-prisoners, and made up his mind. After all the penalty of failure was only death. . . . and " there the prisoners rest together." He was free either way.

It was all over in a moment. Before the bewildered

carriage fully realised what had happened, the door was swinging open, banging to and fro against the sides of the train, and Frank was rolling over and over in the grass beside the railroad.

§ 48

He never once lost consciousness ; even while he spun and rolled his mind was fixed on two necessities—to keep his weight off his bad arm, and to find his feet and run. Before he had got his breath back he was running, while every bone still felt jarred and dislocated ; he did not stop till he was safely thicketed in a scrub of alder. Then he looked back at the train. He could not see it, but he could hear the catch and grind of the brakes. They were stopping it—he must go on—he had got his breath now.

The sunset had gone from the valley—the hills were luminous islands in a lake of shadow. The dusk poured into the cane-brakes, giving its cloak and coolness to Frank as he faltered his way through the wood towards the south. He was bruised and shaken, but he had managed to save his game arm, and no bones were broken. The train had not been going more than twenty miles an hour, and he had dropped into soft grass beside the rail. He still felt rather startled and dizzy, but his spirits rose as he burrowed deeper and deeper into the cane-brakes. He was free—he had won the toss ; of course he would be pursued, but from the running train his pursuers would find it difficult to decide at which point he had entered the wood ; it was not likely that more than a couple of men could be spared to go after him, and any hue and cry from Macon would be useless. The dusk had fallen just at the right moment, a cloak of freedom drooping over him.

" As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,"

he sang without sense in the joy of his liberty. Now and then he stopped and listened, but there was no sound, except the swish and rustle of the wood.

He kept his southern trail till the sunset had guttered out behind the hills, then he crept into the hollow trunk of an

oak, and lay there warm and dry till dawn. He did not sleep much—he was too excited by his freedom and the joy of a night in the open air. He had almost forgotten what it was to look straight up at the stars from his bed, and hear the shiver and sigh of the woods asleep, while spindled arabesques of twig and leaf fluttered against the drenching moonlight.

The next day he found a house, where a woman gave him milk, and told him that several Confederate soldiers had passed of late—hitting the trail for the coast. Frank saw that he had better make the usual escape to Nassau—the only alternative was to strike west and try to join the remains of Hood's army in Alabama. But between him and the boundaries of Georgia lay several strong Yankee detachments; he was not likely ever to get through. Besides, he felt inclined to agree with the Massachusetts nurse that his fighting days were over. He was an old man now—prematurely aged and battered; only fundamental toughness had brought him through his late adventure. He might as well spare himself the sight of the Northern triumph—the victory of commerce over agriculture, civilisation over nature, bricks and mortar over green open spaces, all that he hated over all he loved. He would go to some land where there was still a little green and freedom left, a few fields which the Northern blight had not eaten. . . .

His progress to the coast was slow. He met no Yankees in that south-east corner of Georgia, but every now and then scattered remnants of one of the great Confederate armies —the Army of the Mississippi, or the Army of Tennessee. They were all like him on their way to the coast, runaways from Yankee prison-camps, sole survivors of unrecorded skirmishes, stragglers from desperate marches. They all brought flying bits of rumour, stray ends of bad news, of defeat, humiliation, capture, and rout—Columbia had been sacked, Wilmington had been stormed and seized . . . Richmond was burning. The Confederacy had toppled all round them, and perhaps they were not the best of patriots to be leaving the ruins. But they said " the jig is up," and they were cut off from the main remnants of their armies,

they could lurk on only as guerillas or bushwackers, so perhaps it was well to run from the final humiliation. . . . As for Frank he would never fight again for any army. His cross-country tramp with its perilous beginning had exhausted him—he could not even keep up with his fellow-fugitives, and after a day or so together they would leave him.

After many days he came to the Suwanee River on the borders of Georgia and Florida. For a long time now he had been travelling southward, and had passed from the spring of the chestnut woods into the spring of the orange groves. He was now in the semi-tropical belt about Cancer, and beyond the echoes of war. An unbroken peace dreamed over this sun-swamped country. Little green paths led away from the roads into a jungle as dense as the jungle of the Mississippi; but instead of the hoary darkness of the bearded trees was a web of delicate white and green, orange blossom and jasmine spray, with the umbrella tops of palms, steaming with scent and heat, waving delicate fronds against the heavy blue sky.

At a little farm on the river's bank, ringed with lemon trees, the people were very kind to him. They saw he had reached about the end of his walking powers, so they made him a small raft, on which he could float down the river to the Gulf of Mexico. They had helped, they told him, many Confederate soldiers reach the coast. The farmer's sons had both been killed in Virginia, and for their sakes they helped any Dixie man who passed that way. They gave him eggs, and bread made of maize and rye, also oranges and lemons, and a rug to cover himself at night, and an old flintlock gun. He was glad not to have to walk any further, for during the last few days he had felt the strength running out of him like bran.

It took him a week to reach the Gulf. It was a week of peace, gliding slowly down the green current, watching the tropical groves drift by, breathing in the scent of the jasmine and the orange-flowers, the syringa and oleander and myrtle, which made the thick drowsy air a bath of perfume. Sometimes he played a silly make-believe—that there

was no war, that there had never been a war, nor defeat, nor parting, nor shattering pain, and that all his life he had drifted on this green river through scent and sleeping sunshine. He was on a raft on a river in Paradise, slipping on and on through a peace and beauty that would never end, but was part of the eternal essence of things, the perfect spark of all that on earth seemed so smoky and so vile. . . .

But the illusion could not last, for he was alone, and if there was such a place as Paradise, Lorena would be drifting with him down its green waterways. He thought of her continually as he glided down the Suwanee River; the fragrance of the myrtle and the jasmine was the fragrance of her garden in that far-off May—and the dead will rise and come back as ghosts with the ghost of a dead perfume. Sometimes he seemed to hear her voice calling him through the groves, to see the paleness of her cheek in the jasmine that dipped from the cotton-wood trees, to feel the softness of her hand in the thick fanning air. He felt that she could not be far from all this beauty, for it was her own special loveliness—the aromatic beauty of the South. She did not belong to cold fresh skies or rain-sweet February sods, but to all the swooning langour of the South, to vines and palms and spices and tropical stars; the azalea was a type of her who had never seen the primrose. . . .

Sometimes he bowed his head over his hands and cried for her, the dearest, most beautiful thing he had known. His holy one . . . with her had gone his youth, and all those soaring ardours which had made his manhood perfect. But he did not grieve long—for he was beginning to know that what the spirit of man has loved it can never entirely lose. Though she was gone from him, she still was his—as long as the south wind should blow. She had sealed herself eternally to him on the day when she chose death rather than degradation for the body that he loved. She had left her life perfect in his hands, white and perfumed and sensuous as the orange flowers. He could never lose her, who had loved him unto death. She was there with him on the warm river, in the shadow of the orange trees, in the

raking moonlight, in the gleam of the jasmine stars—she was there in his weakness, as he lay sunning himself like a tired beast in the heat, she brooded over his startled sleep, she walked in his dreams. . . . He could never lose her, for she belonged to that spark within him which would never go out, because it was part of the one eternal fire, of the star-stuff from which worlds are made.

In the hushed velvet nights, when all was still save for the gurgle and lap of the water round his raft, he would lie and watch the great stars burn in the dim indigo above the trees. Lying there he would see all human endeavour and travail as a challenge to their remoteness—the wars and calamities of nations, the loves and sacrifices of men were so many challenges to Sirius, to the great Indifference. Every human life was a challenge to Sirius. The remoteness of these Great Ones was being assailed, for men were finding that in their own breasts burned a spark of the fire that had set the stars alight. . . .

So the nights and days went by—in drowsings and dreams, glimpses and graspings. Slowly and sleepily, swimming in sunshine, Frank was gliding out of America. He hardly spoke to a human being on all that slow long drift. Sometimes in the distance he would see yellow-walled farms, cradled in sunshine and their orange groves, and sometimes he passed queer little wooden steam-boats, with huge unwieldy paddle-boxes that made them look like snails. Once in the wake of one of these snails, grappled to it by a cable of rope, he was towed two dozen miles down the shining river. At last the live-oaks began to creep into the jungle, and the salt-wash into the stream, and early one April morning, Frank saw the wide thick blue of the Gulf of Mexico, with the crests of the waves licked with sunshine, and a flock of flying-fish spinning over the water in a cloud of iridescent rose.

§ 49

At the mouth of the river Frank found a clump of fishermen's huts, and one or two cutters, and fore-and-aft

schooners, at the moorings. He thought it would be as well to see if he could sail from here, rather than tramp eastward to the more doubtful safety of Cedar Keys. To his joy he found another Confederate soldier drinking cobbler at the small groggery on the beach. The man was a fugitive from Hood's wreck in Alabama, and was going to Nassau in a fore-and-after which was sailing that night. He introduced Frank to the master, who had crept round the coast more than once, dodging the Union fleet at Key West, smuggling outlaws into the protection of the British flag on the Bahamas.

He was inclined to be rusty when he found that this new refugee had not a cent to his name, or any barterable weapon except an old flintlock. The man from Alabama had, it is true, nothing but paper-dollars, shin-plasters which were not worth the paper they were printed on. But he had an excellent rifle and cartridge belt and a tolerable pair of boots, also a watch and a couple of gold rings, for he had once been a man of means, and came from a plantation near Brashear City, where at the fall of New Orleans he had burnt ten thousand pounds' worth of cotton-bales rather than let them fall into the hands of John Brown's Army. In consideration of all this wealth, the master at last agreed to ship the two of them. Frank spent the afternoon on the beach with his fellow refugee, sharing with him the last of the stuff he had been given at Bushrod's Grove, and watching the thin little waves run out and in over a mosaic of golden sand and pink and purple shells.

The night came—the darkness fell quickly, almost with the rush of the tropics. Frank and the planter from Brashear went aboard the *Senator Wigfall*. She looked a small frail craft for such a voyage, but she ran a better chance of slipping the Yankee watch-dogs than a larger vessel. Her crew, besides the master, consisted of a mate, a man, and a boy.

The wind was blowing from the north, whistling behind a huge dark cloud which came drifting down over the woods of Florida.

"Looks as if we were going to have dirty weather," said the Brashear planter; "I don't much fancy a sail in this coco-nut shell."

"I guess we'll be hugging the coast most of the time," said Frank, "and anyhow the storm's going westward—see the drift?"

He was feeling slightly thrilled and confused by the thought that probably in a few days he would be once more under the British flag. He had grown wonderfully American in three years—he knew it; he spoke with the soft slow drawl of the South, he used American words and phrases, had grown used to American food; the very way he brushed his hair and trimmed his nails was American. Still, he would be glad to find himself English again, though he had never fought and suffered or been wounded or gone hungry for England, as he had for Dixie.

At last they were aboard, and the palm beach was running away from the *Senator Wigfall* as she turned her bows eastward. Frank thought of the day that seemed a hundred years ago when the *Margaret Monypenny*, dipping and swaying like a delicate white swan, had glided up the Cape Fear River, and he had sat in the bows, gazing out at the brackish lagoons and skew-blown pines of the Great Dismal Swamp. . . .

To-night he sat in the stern and watched the tufts and fringes of the palms dipping into the huge black cloud that swagged over them. The little choppy waves were running in wider and wider ridges between the *Senator Wigfall* and the coast. The master was at the wheel, and the ship's boy, as he coiled a rope, sang from force of habit—

> "Wish I was in the land of cotton,
> Cinnamon tree and sandy bottom!
> Look away! Look away! Dixie Land!"

Frank sat in the stern, with the scud of the white wake flying over him, watching the coast of Florida disappear. Gradually it faded into the blackness behind it, till at last there was nothing but cloud and sea and that land of tempests was blotted out in storm.

PART V

THE ALTAR IN THE FOREST

§ 1

WHEN the *Senator Wigfall* had been eight hours at sea, the wind shifted to the north, and began to blow furiously. The big northern cloud came down over the coast and rolled out into the Gulf, smothering the stars. The wretched little schooner bobbed like a cork on the waves ; at first the shift of the wind had put her in irons, but the master swung her helm a-lee and sent the men up to furl her driver. For a little while she ran close to the wind, but as the storm increased she made more and more leeway. The dreaded " Norther " of the Gulf of Mexico was blowing down on her, and the master decided to put her into the north of the Oonaulee Creek, which was now half a dozen miles to windward.

The night was pitch, and the screaming of the wind, with the whistle and thrum of the rigging and ratlines, was so deafening that Frank and the Brashear planter could scarcely hear each other speak as they sat in the deck-house. The planter was very sick, but Frank, rather to his surprise, stood the tossing and lurching and wallowing without a qualm. His chief fear was that the schooner would be blown out of her course, and he knew this was also the fear of the master and the mate. The former was inclined to put the blame on his passengers.

" If it hadn't been for your blamed hurriment I'd never have put to sea on a night like this. We'll be blown across the Gulf before we see Nassau."

At dawn he stuck his head into the deck-house and told

them that he had been unable to put into Oonaulee—the *Senator Wigfall* was being carried out into the Gulf in the teeth of the Norther, the waves beating her harder and harder as she drove from the shore. The thump of the water on her sides shook her from truck to keelson, and it seemed to Frank as if in time she must split or buckle with the violence of repeated blows. Huge seas were now breaking over the deck-house, threatening to wash it away. Frank had his fears to himself, for the planter was too sea-sick to mind if they went to the bottom.

At dawn the ship's boy brought them some bread and coffee, Frank eating the double portion. Afterwards he asked the mate if he could do anything to help aboard, but was told to keep out of the way. He spent a miserable day boxed up in the deck-house with his sea-sick friend, unable to see anything outside but a drench of rain and spray, and every now and then a huge green wall that rose out of the storm, curled and toppled, drowning everything in darkness and thunder, so that it was surprising to find himself alive again in the half-light, with the sound of water—pouring, dribbling, splashing, dropping, sucking—and the wind screaming on its relentless climax, and the creaks and cracks and groans of the struggling schooner, which was almost like a live thing lamenting in its trouble.

By evening the *Senator Wigfall* had given up even the pretence of her eastward struggle, and was scudding with bare poles before the wind. She had not been built to weather such storms, and it seemed as if every moment must end her. The next morning the deck-house was straining and creaking so ominously that Frank and the Brashear planter were told to come below. Hitherto the sick man had refused to enter the stifling little cabin, but now at any moment the deck-house might be stove in, and there was nothing for it but to stew and retch in the darkness where an oil lamp swung like a censer to the rock of the schooner's throes.

It seemed an eternity that the *Senator Wigfall* ran before the Norther, Cancer-wards, across the Gulf—groaning and

plunging in her agony, shuddering and heeling as the great waves battered her. She had been built for coast trade—the quiet glide round by Cape Sable to the Straits of Florida, or at most for the calms of the Gulf. It was not long before her deck-house had been carried away, her stearing-gear smashed, and, as she suddenly griped, her foremast snapped like a dry stick and came down on her deck in a mess of rigging—killing the ship's boy and threatening to drag over the schooner, till the master and mate cut the wreck clear and it shot into the sea.

On the third day she was leaking badly, and instead of the usual surly command to keep out of the way, Frank was called to the pumps to do his share of keeping her afloat. The planter was past work : he had stopped being sick, but lay utterly exhausted in one of the bunks, green and feeble, as sorry a land-lubber as ever a master took aboard.

" We shan't see Nassau this voyage," the latter said to Frank, " but I guess any place will do for you that ain't the States—even if it's the bottom of the sea, which is your likeliest port, I don't mind tellin' you."

He and the mate and the man blamed the two passengers for all their ill-luck. If it had not been for them, the *Senator Wigfall* would not have sailed. The sky had looked bad—though the sudden shift of the wind had come as a surprise. Also the reward was inadequate. Cyrus H. Prentiss of Suwanee key might run a couple of Dixie men over to Nassau on a calm day for no more than these two had given him ; but to take big risks for so little reward was more than his patriotism could swallow, and the fact that most of the danger had been unforeseen at the start, and the rest of it voluntarily chanced in a sporting spirit, did nothing to soothe him now.

" The best we can hope is for the storm to go down and let us run into Havana," he grumbled, " but we're more like to be blown on the coast of Mexico."

On the morning of the fourth day the black clouds lifted, but the wind still blew furiously from the north, with a touch of east in it, and the schooner still ran before

the storm, no longer bobbing like a cork on the waves, but wallowing in the trough of them as the water rose in her hold. The sky was a garish wind-swept blue, with streamers of cloud rushing over it, and beneath it the sea was glass-green, ring-straked with shadows, and split with the white foaming crests of the waves. The men were haggard after a night at the pumps, and their faces turned grimmer when over the roar and scuffle of the sea came the hollow sound of waves pounding on a coast. From the deck could be seen a flat wooded coastline, with long spines of rocks running out from it. The *Senator Wigfall*, helpless and rudderless, was being blown straight on the coast of Yucatan.

There was nothing to do but prepare for the worst. The tackle of the one boat was loosened, and a few tins of biscuit put into her. She was carried astern, and had not suffered so much as might have been expected. If the schooner grounded they would probably be able to reach the coast in her. The planter, very womanish and wan, was brought up from below, and gradually the din of the waves on the rocks grew louder, and at last there was a sound under the keel like a giant tearing calico, followed by a heavy thud and a shock that sent the *Senator Wigfall* shuddering fore and aft. Then her seams opened as she hogged on the rock, her bows and her stern dropping from amidships with loud splittings and crackings.

The waves dashing over her made it almost impossible to launch the boat. The planter, as he staggered along the deck, was washed down into the wound that gaped between the jigger and the stern. Shouting to each other through the wind, the survivors scarcely troubled about him. The boat was lowered, and they all four got into her—the master, the mate, the man, and Rainger. The next minute a huge wave caught her, and flung her in savage mockery against the bulging sides of the schooner, smashing her like a shell and scattering her spars over the sea like a burst packet of firewood.

So Frank had not escaped very far after all. He had escaped death on land only to find it on the sea. Clinging

to a broken spar, an impotent atom in that huge green heave of water, he was the plaything of the waves, which like lion-cubs rolled him and tossed him and sucked him before they swallowed him up. He saw lying behind him the whole futility of his life ; it seemed to him now like a mumbled string of meaningless prayers, a foolish litany which ended in the priest falling asleep. He had never realised the utter littleness and vanity of life till now—when death was so mighty and so vast that it seemed to put life to shame.

§ 2

It was part of the general futility to find himself alive—and not so very much damaged, though drenched and a little bruised—on the fine yellow sand. The waves had flung him away, the death of their green pits and wells was too grand a death for the likes of him to die. He sat up on the sand, and he could feel his clothes drying on his back in the burning fierceness of the sun. Strewn round him were huge glaucous shells, and others shaped like wings, and like razors, streaked with pink and violet. The beauty of it all made him gasp. A flock of flamingoes rose suddenly from a lagoon behind the sand, and swept over the sky in a cloud of flame. Beyond the lagoon was a low tangled bush, with a fringe of coco-nut palms and greeny gold banana trees picked out against a background of blackish bice. Over it all the sunshine poured and danced, a swamp of light. The clouds were shredding away from the sky, and the wind had tired of beating the waves, which rolled more slowly on the sand, and ebbed, as if exhausted by their fury, in a long-drawn sigh.

For half an hour Frank sat on the shore and waited—for an oar or a spar, or any chance of the master, mate, or man of the *Senator Wigfall*. But the waves brought nothing, and he never knew what had happened to his companions —whether they had been dashed to pieces against the wreck or sucked down under it, or thrown like him unscathed upon the beach. He could not even see the

schooner ; either she was hidden by a northward hook of the coast, or had been broken up on her reef.

He decided not to wait any longer. The heat was scorching, and his clothes were now nearly as dry as if he had never been in the water ; he did not particularly care about the *Senator's* crew—he preferred to strike out alone for some village or farm, where he could orient himself and make plans. He had gathered from the master that they had gone ashore on the coast of Yucatan. He thought he had heard of it—it seemed to belong to geography lessons with Mr. Bellack, but his memory could supply no details. Anyhow he supposed it was a civilised country, or as civilised as anywhere in Central America—mostly Spanish, he supposed. Well, no doubt he could make himself understood, and perhaps get shipped to the Bahamas.

A small creek led from the shore, past the lagoon with its flamingoes, stiff and decorative as a Japanese print, into the bush, where the blackish-green shadows looked cool. Only his wet hair had saved him from sunstroke on the beach, and now his head was aching. He picked two wide, shiny banana leaves and tied them on his head with a thong of creeper.

On either side of the creek grew huge mangrove trees, their brown snake-like roots writhing several feet above the water, and all silted up with mud and sand. The creek was full of life—in the thick green water he could see fish with pike-like jaws, while over the shore of sun-baked mud lizards slipped to and fro, or basked on the shelves that the silted sand had made among the mangrove roots. A flock of jays darted from a thicket of wild sugar-cane, and gaudy parrakeets chased each other in and out of the sunshine with raucous, chuckling cries. The air was full of the hum of insects, that flashed past him like splinters of a broken rainbow, and loveliest of all, butterflies as big as his hand and all manner of colours—yellow and purple and blue and orange, spotted and stipped and ringstraked, like the wonders of a dream.

His clothes were getting wet again as the perspiration

first dribbled, then ran over his skin; soon they were as wet as when he had crawled out of the sea. He was glad when he saw a small trail leading off from the creek into the bush—here was complete shadow, not even the filtered sunshine of the Mississippi jungle, but a green darkness, the obscurity of a cellar faintly lighted from above.

He followed the path for a couple of miles, then squatted down to rest. The sun had ceased to grin and burn, but he walked through an oven of imprisoned heat, thick, breathless, steaming, so that his sweat dropped behind him on the narrow track of red sandy earth. However, he knew that the only thing to do was to follow the trail in hopes that it would soon bring him to some farm or settlement—after all, it was bound to lead somewhere.

He pulled himself to his feet and staggered on.

The forest was so dark that he could not have seen to read. The trees were knotted together by giant creepers, some as thick as his arm, which spun a great cobweb from tree to tree. These were not tall and majestic like the forest trees of America, but dwarfed and ungainly; there was something vaguely repulsive about that stunted forest, all webbed and choked with dense, straggling growths, empty of animal life, a mere nightmare of coiling vegetation.

The absence of animals made him suspect the absence of water, and he hoped it would not be long before he came to a village; but the path crawled obstinately on, sometimes so narrow that he feared it would tail off altogether, sometimes widening to a couple of feet. As long as it lasted there was no fear of his straying from it, for the bush at the sides was literally impenetrable—a solid mass of trees and lianas, perhaps a hundred miles thick. He remembered with a shrug of irony how a fortnight ago he had bewailed the victory of the North, the triumph of civilisation over Nature. . . . And here was Nature, triumphant after all, menacent, all-devouring—the anæmic forces of civilisation had a poor chance against her lustiness.

Most of the trees he saw were unknown to him—some were evergreens, some, the giants, rose about sixty feet, others were stubby ; some grew big strange gourds, and some bore white, soapy-looking fruit. There were no flowers, though once in a sudden rift of sunlight he saw huge orchids dangling, their purple lips and white, pitcher-shaped calixes vivid against the green. Except for the rub of his feet on the sandy track, a profound silence brooded—no wind stirred the leaves, no animal padded in the bush, snuffled or roared, no bird sang.

After a time he began to note a strange tickling irritation in his flesh, and to his dismay he saw that he was covered with small round insects like sheep-tick, which had burrowed right into him, so that only the tops of their backs were seen. They hung from the branches and shrubs in brown patches, and he had at first taken them for fungus, a kind of vegetable rust ; now he saw that they were the one thing in all that tanglewood which was not vegetable. They were evidently a form of cattle-louse. He tried to dig them out of his skin, but they were too deeply imbedded, and he could not get rid of them till they had become swollen and purple with blood, when they dropped out of their own accord.

He knew now that if he did not soon come to some farm or hamlet he would probably die. He had neither food nor water, he was exhausted by his walk through the choking heat, and his life seemed to be running out of him in sweat. As the sea had mocked him, so Nature mocked him now. She held him in the green hollow of her hand and grinned at him. He had doubted her power, he had looked with certainty for her overthrow ; and now before she squeezed his head like a maggot's she would show him that she was almighty.

Night dropped suddenly. The green became black. It was impossible to walk without stumbling or barking himself against trunks and boughs. He resolved to make the best of a bad business, and lay down on the path. It was turning cold. Perhaps he would die before morning.

Well, he did not much care—he had been swinging so long over the pit that it would be almost a relief to drop into it. Besides, what could life hold for him, who had lost love and home and country and youth? At best he would somehow get back to England to find himself forgotten, and the old things changed; at worst, and there was not much to choose between best and worst, he would knock about the tropics—Yucatan, Mexico, the Indies—homeless and spiritually footsore, a worn-out, played-out old soldier of fortune.

He was exhausted by the business of keeping alive. It was curious and ironic that life had never been so difficult to hold as now when he had ceased to value it. He might as well die and be done. His flash of revived youth had vanished, like an Indian summer blazing out of the woods, then dying down into colourless mortality. He had lost the comfort of Lorena's haunting: even her ghost was gone. He remembered almost contemptuously the strange fiery exaltation which had rapt him on the Suwanee River. Sun and water and flowers and stars had woven that brede, and here was nothing but waterless, flowerless, starless night.

He lay huddled on the path, and must have fallen asleep, for suddenly he found that the darkness had lifted—the heavy green daylight was round him again, brooding over the silence. He felt stiff and clammy, and saw that a heavy dew had fallen everywhere, and dripped from the creepers like rain. He greedily sucked it off the leaves, and felt refreshed. Then he looked round him, and passed his hand over his eyes. Were they deceiving him, or was that really a cleaving in the trees . . . with buildings?

He must have slept all night within a stone's-throw of a village. He could have had food and roof if he had gone twenty yards further. But he was too deeply relieved to feel much regret. What a strong tug life had after all—death might be welcome to extremity, but to nothing short of it.

He hurried towards the village, and noticed as strange

that, like the forest, it was quite without sound. There were no lowings of animals or voices of men. Perhaps it was still asleep, in spite of the lit meridian. He could now see the buildings clearly through the thinning trees—they were large buildings, too; he had not expected to find more than a few thatched huts. Yucatan must be more civilised than he had thought.

Then suddenly he stood still. For at least two minutes he did not move, but stood and gazed. He had come clear of the trees, and the sunshine poured down upon what he had taken for a village—some comfortable spot where he could find shelter, food, and human kindness, and human speech in that jabbering horror of silence. They were buildings, certainly, colossal, cyclopean, but they were vain shells, eaten ruins, the dead remains of some vanished city, crumbled, deserted, empty, without sound; and over them all rioted the unchecked growth of the forest, creepers hung matted down their walls, and out of their roofs broke tall trees.

In the middle was a huge stubbed pyramid mounting in five tiers for several hundred feet; it was grown over with vegetation—great cactus, with thorns two inches long, and a thick shrubby climber starred with gaudy yellow flowers. On the right of it was a temple-like structure, stamped with a frieze which had withstood the gnaw of time and still showed the continual print of a large red hand round the four walls. A creeper dripped from its parapet, and all round it lay broken images and stelæ which had fallen from its crown-plumed warriors with hooked Indian noses, carrying battle-axes and strange symbols. Not far from it the remains of an arch reared out of a shrubbery of dense spiny growths; its walls were mangy with creepers, and at the top of it, in final mockery, waved a great palm. . . .

There was a loud drumming in Frank's ears as he stared at the dead city, the carcase of a dead civilisation which had been long ago. In the white glaring sunshine he saw lizards dart over the walls, in and out of the cracks;

nothing else moved, for there was no wind to shake the trees of the silence. As he stood there, sick with thwarted hope, the silence seemed to shout the hymn of Nature triumphant, of Nature given the bones of cities to eat. The North might flourish for a time, build cities and factories, spread civilisation, wipe out the green, but the final victory was with the South. Over the cities that civilisation had built Nature would one day wave her mocking green flag—like the palm on the arch. He saw New York and London as this buried city of Yucatan—their streets broken up by the sprouting grass, green creepers pulling out their stones, and trees bursting through their walls. Nature is the final victor over all—over progress, civilisation, and man, and it is she which shall eat up the world when the world's day is done.

. . . Then a shadow began to creep over the sky, it smudged out the trees, and the dead city passed from him in a sheet of darkness.

§ 3

Ginger-beer at Cranbrook Fair . . . it was good . . . had he enough money to pay for another bottle? . . . a bottle for him and Maggie to share . . . He would let her drink first, though he was terribly thirsty . . . because she was his little love . . . Maggie!

He sat up, and the gourd of anise fell. He stared about him in bewilderment. He was lying against the arm of a stout middle-aged man, in a cassock and an enormous shovel hat, evidently a priest. All round them stood the ruins, with their creepers and shrubs and palms, the crumbled stones cheese-coloured in the thick yellow sunshine.

"Bueño!" said the priest. Then he asked a question which Frank could not understand. He shook his head and shut his eyes again.

Soon he felt himself being lifted, hauled to his knees, then raised up off them with two strong hands under his armpits. He opened his eyes and saw a mule with a head-dress of bells. The priest, who was an immensely strong,

though rather corpulent, fellow, lugged him towards it, talking the while and asking questions. Frank only groaned and shook his head—then he caught the word "Americano," and nodded.

At last he was on the mule's back, clinging to the high peaked saddle, his feet in great stirrups like pockets. As the priest took the bridle Frank pointed to the ruins all about them and made an interrogative sign.

"Casas de Piedras," said the priest, and shrugged. He evidently did not think much of the dead city.

The mule jingled along the track, Frank rocking stupidly to and fro in the saddle, the priest holding the reins with one hand, Frank's leg with the other. The trail wound on as before for nearly a mile, but the forest was thinning and the silence was breaking. There were movements among the trees, and the call of birds; a raccoon suddenly ran across the path, and the butterflies began their rainbow dance. The track grew wider, and after a time the trees fell away, and in their place came a henequen plantation —even lines of waxy green feathers waving from what looked like unripe pineapples. Various domestic noises could be heard—the crowing of cocks, the lowing of cattle, and women's voices calling. Beyond a clump of trees a belfry rose against the lazy sky, and the track suddenly ran into a road—a red, sandy road, made adventurous with rocks and ledges, and streaked with numberless processions of ants. Then the village appeared, a huddle of adobe huts round an enormous yellow sixteenth-century church—built in the very worst style of its period, hideous, caked with mouldering stucco, preposterous in its surroundings of native huts and primeval forest.

It was very hot, and the air was thick with a miasma of over-ripe vegetation—the peculiar smell of the tropics, like sour milk. In the village they passed one or two women wrapped over the head with linen cloths, indigo and copper, carrying on their hips jugs and gourds to the limestone well which lay in a ring of trees.

The priest halted the mule outside an adobe house not

very different from the others, except that it had a little garden where grew roses and tulipans and irises, all smothered over with a purple convulvulus. In Yucatan Frank was hardly ever to see a plant or tree, outside the henequen fields, which was not in the process of being strangled by some other.

" Maria ! " cried the priest. " Maria ! "

A woman came running out of the house, dressed like the village women, in a shift of clay-coloured cotton, with an indigo veil or huipil wound over her head. She and the priest talked together excitedly, evidently about Frank, who now stood leaning against the mule. He caught the word " Americano " once or twice. Then the woman beckoned him into the house.

He followed her into the kitchen, an earth-floored room full of smoke, furnished with a trestle table and a few raw-hide stools. A couple of lean dogs prowled round his feet, sniffing suspiciously, and he also noticed one or two brindled cats, very lean and wild ; one of them was tearing to pieces the body of some small animal, while the others sat round and miauled.

The woman signed to Frank to sit down at the table, under which he discovered a little colony of fowls. She set before him a bottle of anise and a plate of yellow maize-cakes. These did not taste bad, but he could scarcely eat, neither did he want to drink the anise, which was extraordinarily sweet and potent, like mead. He tried to ask for water by signs, but could not make himself understood till the entrance of the priest suggested to him that he and the holy Father might have one language in common. He asked for " aqua " and was understood at once.

" Agua," said the master of the house to Maria, and she went out with a calabash gourd, soon returning with about a quart of sweet icy-cold well water, delicious to his thirstiness.

He felt refreshed, and was able to eat a little of the tortillas. Then the priest led him into another room, which was quite bare except for a couple of hammocks

swung from the ceiling. He signed to Frank to climb into one of them, and though the room was like an oven, with the glare of the sun on the adobe and thatch, Rainger had scarcely lain down, with rather an evil-smelling pillow between his cheek and the cords of the hammock, than he fell into a deep sleep.

§ 4

For a few days he was in a kind of stupor, tottering about the place. His mind had withdrawn within itself, and closed the gates. The past did not trouble him—either his recent adventures and escapes, or the remoter tragedies of Dixie. He did not think of the future—it did not seem to exist. In that land of "mañana" it was always to-day. As for the present, it drifted slowly by him like a stream, lazy and still—sunshine had glared and dreamed, trees that threw burnt brown shadows on the red dust, creepers that clung and trailed, flowers that drenched the evenings with perfume—Indian women gossiping at the well, Indian boys running about with oily naked skins, messes of garlick and frijoles, drinks of anise and cold, stone-tasting water, voices speaking in an unknown tongue . . . and round it all the forest with its secrets of buried cities, over it all the brooding of the yellow sixteenth-century church, huge, decaying, yet dominating, and somehow strangely akin to the forest, as if the two shared the same primeval secret.

Each day was like the last. He spent his time lying about in the shade, dozing under the ceibo trees or in the shadow of the church ; sometimes he wandered down into the village, past the jefetura with its American clock, to the cenote where the blue and terra-cotta shifts of the women spotted the limestone. Nobody seemed curious about him or to wish him away—in his drowsings and loungings he was just like every one else, for all the village drowsed and lounged from dawn to dusk. Naked children lay curled up in the patches of shade, sometimes indiscriminately mixed with dogs and cats or even pigs ; older

girls and boys sprawled under the trees, and never seemed to have an errand that did not admit of lying down for half an hour's sleep by the way; the women would sit motionless for hours on their thresholds, their housework seldom going beyond the cooking of the inevitable frijoles and *chile con carne*, or washing their clothes at the well. As for the men, presumably they worked in the henequen fields of the big hacienda outside the village, but it was a labour to which they strolled as languidly as they strolled back, and Frank liked to picture them lying in the green shadow of the henequen plumes, dozing and dreaming like every one else in Zicxin, or, as he sometimes thought, the whole of Yucatan.

The priest's household consisted of himself, Maria, and an Indian boy called Primitivo, who occupied the other hammock in Frank's room. They seemed to take Rainger quite as a matter of course, never hinted that he should leave them, and asked him no more questions. He was beginning to pick up bits and ends of their language, helped by his half-forgotten Latin, though less than he had at first expected, for his Latin was classical and Father Cristobal's was ecclesiastical—entirely limited to his breviary.

Father Cristobal went at every dawn into the church, where he said daily Mass with an Indian server who wore a cassock and cotta over his naked body. He once suggested that Frank should take part in this ceremony, but Rainger declined and the priest had not pressed the matter further. There was an old-fashioned stately courtesy about him, in spite of the fact that he spat between every sentence, and Frank welcomed his entire lack of curiosity. One reason why he was able so comfortably to ignore both his past and his future was Father Cristobal's abstention from questioning him on either.

He soon became aware that the relationship between the priest and Maria was not merely that of master and servant. At first he had been puzzled in his efforts to place her, but as in time he grew familiar with the accepted

standards of morality in the village and in that particular branch of the Roman Church, which—like a limb that has not moved for years or had its due share of the body's blood—existed numb and rotting in the bush of Yucatan, he doubted no longer. Maria Bravo was, like most people in the neighbourhood, of mixed Indian and Spanish breed, a quiet brown-faced woman, whose skin had been teased by the sun into innumerable little hair-like lines. She wore the shift and huipil of an Indian woman, and always round her neck a big rosary of coloured glass beads, ending in a metal crucifix. She cleaned the house—or rather at intervals emphasized the dirt by clean patches—she cooked the food with that drowsy want of energy and imagination that was characteristic of Zicxin, where in every hut every day is set the same invariable meal of *chile con carne* or minced meat, with tortillas and black beans. The rest of the time she spent squatting in the doorway, half asleep, or else at her devotions, which she performed with great regularity both at home and in the church.

Sometimes, with a soldier's love of cleanness, Frank would help her scrub out the house : he would wash her earthen cooking vessels, and scour the chicken-dung and dried expectorations off the floors. But the manners and customs of the Presbytery did not allow this purified state to be more than transient, and in time Frank, worn languid by the climate, came almost to accept the Yucatecan view of dirt. He occasionally did odd jobs about the garden, fetched water from the cenote if Primitivo were lost or asleep, and groomed Contrario, the Father's mule, with a thoroughness and efficiency which must have surprised that beast.

Sometimes he wandered out into the bush, down the red track to the ruined city, where he would sit in the shadow cast by some column or slab, and drink in the overgrown, sun-steeped peace of the forgotten place. Knowing nothing of Yucatecan history, he was unable to reconstruct the life which had once filled these mouldering,

stifled courts—except that from the carvings he gathered it had been a life of priests and warriors. Perhaps the history of these buildings was part of the history of Mexico, of the wars of Cortez with Montezuma's heroes in their feather coats. . . . No one in the village could tell him anything. The city had no name—it was called by the Spanish "Casas do Piedras" or stone houses, by the Indians "Xlap-pak." He was told that there were several others scattered about the bush, some so densely overgrown that it was impossible for a man to fight his way into their streets.

He also haunted the church, though for a long time he never went inside. He would lie and sleep in the shadow of the belfry, and sometimes drowsily picture the times when Zicxin had been able to fill this monstrous barrack on holy-days. Now obviously it could accommodate five times its congregation, though every one in the village was most regular at Mass. The stucco walls were peeling, and a kind of gangrene spread over them in places, its bell was cracked and uttered a hideous sound between a squawk and a tinkle—and yet never failed to stir Frank with a strange, deep feeling of awe when it rang the Angelus, or Vespers, and afterwards nine solemn strokes for the Nine Mysteries.

When at last curiosity led him aside, he found the church very much what he would have expected—tawdry, huge, and dirty. It had seven altars, all thickly caked with the red dust which blew in from the road, and the pillars were hung with mouldy festoons of coloured paper. Against the north wall, between the altars of St. Anthony and St. Pelagia, was a Crucifixion which seemed to concentrate the church's peculiar spirit. It was a hideous thing, in which the imagination of the Indian carver had characteristically run riot in horrors. There was blood everywhere, red paint slopped over the Cross and the Christ, even dripping on the traditional mourners beneath. Crucifixion here was not the peaceful, almost elegant death it was represented in ecclesiastical art, but

a realistic and undignified nightmare of horror and torture and indecency. Frank was further struck by the fact that the figures were all Indians. Accustomed as he was to a Greek Christ and a German Mary, he was surprised to find in the place of the former a crucified Indian boy, whose traditional beard was no more than the sparse down that a beardless Indian might have grown, and to see that the Madonna was just a native woman with her head wrapped in her huipil and in her ears the big earrings the women of Zicxin wore. The scene, though made more grotesque thereby, gained immeasurably in emotional intenseness. It ceased to be an unapproachable mystery, but became a common spectacle, the death of a God Who indeed had been man—a tortured Indian boy. . . .

Frank turned away, feeling curiously stirred. For the rest the church was just a dirty barrack, with its dusty altars, paper flowers, and spittoons everywhere, even in the Sanctuary.

§ 5

So the weeks passed, and it seemed as if he had lived for years in Yucatan. He had forgotten the bite of the north wind and the hard crunch of snow, he had forgotten the slow dawns and the creeping dusks, the physical glow which comes after a hard swinging walk over a frosty road, or after a day's work when cool rainy gusts blow a man's shirt against his skin. His thoughts and dreams were full of the same hot fume of sunshine, the grinning sky at which it was almost painful to look, the dust that flew all day along the *camino real*, where one's feet sank to the ankles in the red drifts, and the continual surrounding struggle of vegetation, trees and creepers and shrubs and flowers, all fighting for life in the forest, which waged its own unending war with the henequen fields and the maize milpas and all other works of man.

But gradually he was being ruffled by the consciousness that he could not lounge in Zicxin for ever, that he must

not abuse the questionless hospitality of Father Cristobal Sanchez. He ought to leave, he ought to work, he ought to try to get to Nassau. Yet now he knew that he wanted to stay ; the spirit of that heavy land was upon him, and he felt that he desired nothing better than to bask in its sun and doze in its shade, all the aching depths of his being lulled to sleep by the eternal warmth and calm, the flowers, and forests, the " mañana " on every tongue. . . . After all, why should he trouble to go back to England ? He had no friends there—he was pretty sure Mr. Bellack was dead, and anyhow he alone could not make a country habitable. As for Maggie, he was probably best away from her, for though his love for her had been swallowed up in a greater love, possibly her husband might still be untrustful—besides, he feared disillusion. There was still the Isle of Oxney, that pale damp green hill rising out of the marshes and the thin spreading waters of the overflow, but the call of it here was weak, drowned in the continual tropical pulse and hum—it had no more tug on him than the country of a dream. He was growing used to the dusty sunshine, the panting twilights, the nights of unknown fiery stars—he was being sucked up by the old primeval spirit of the forest, which, with its unlikely kin, the church, was the spirit that brooded over Yucatan.

About this time, however, something happened which smoothed his path. The Indian boy, Primitivo, ran away—to join the brigands, it was said. Frank, after a few hours' hesitation, offered himself to the Father in his place. He would undertake to do all Primitivo's not very arduous duties for Primitivo's not very splendid wages—his food, his hammock, and fifty centavos a week. He would now feel that he could stay on as long as he liked at Zicxin, for he would certainly serve the Father better than Primitivo.

He had by this time picked up a fair amount of Spanish. The mixed sweetness and dignity of the language enticed him ; it was like the wine of Tarragona, honeyed and pompous—more stately than Italian, more musical than French. The dusk was rushing down swiftly over the sky

and the woods, and he and Father Cristobal were watching it from the ceibo trees outside the church—those trees from which the Indian legend says the Spirits of the Dead climb up to Paradise.

The priest listened with grave courtesy to his guest's offer, then he said—

"But I do not wish you to think, Señor Americano, that you are not free to remain under my poor roof as long as you please."

"I am sure of your hospitality, Padre, but, believe me, I should be happier if I were doing something to deserve it."

"But Primitivo's is a servant's work."

Frank insisted that he could sleep in the sun at fifty centavos a week without any loss to his dignity.

"Besides, Father, it would give me great pleasure if you would allow me to attend to your garden, and to the milpas of the Presbytery. I am a farmer in my own country and used to growing fruit and corn."

"Your own country, señor—and do you never wish to return to your own country?"

Frank shook his head—

"I have no country—now," he said shortly; "let me remain on here in the sun where the air is so hot and sweet that it puts me to sleep, and I forget."

Father Cristobal did not speak for a moment, then he said—

"This is a good country for forgetting." After all it was only the broken clergy that were buried in the forest pueblos of Yucatan.

"I don't so much want to forget," continued Frank, "as I want to remember slowly. I want only one thing to come back to me at a time, so that I shall not be confounded."

"You have suffered much, my son?"

Frank nodded.

"But the Virgin has stood by you—I can see it, for you keep pure in your sorrows. You do not drink, nor go with the loose women."

"You know I am not a Catholic. And as for drink and

women I have no taste for either, or I should probably go after both."

"And Who is it Who has given you your pure distastes, my son, if it is not Our Blessed Lady, the spotless Tower of Ivory? Even though you may be unbelieving and schismatic, how do you not know that, like the rain of Heaven which falls on the just and the unjust, She has not strengthened you by Her care and intercessions? She may have used these strange ways to lead you to the one true Church. I can trace Her hand in the fate which, instead of letting you sail into an heretical English port, threw you on the shore of Catholic Yucatan."

Frank did not speak; he noticed that the priest's face was lit up by a strange exalted glow when he spoke of Mary —normally the face of a healthy, good-humoured sensualist, it now looked almost spiritual.

"I know that She has stood by me," he continued in a husky, reverent voice. "Again and again I have cried to Her from the deep, and each time She has heard my voice —'Ave Maria, stella maris!'—and now She has allowed me to end my days in peace. She has brought me into this harbour of calm and sunshine, and the last of my life shall be devoted to Her service, to the perpetual veneration of Her Most Pure Heart and Her Seven Sorrows. I am Her son and Her servant."

He took a little coloured medallion out of his breast and kissed it adoringly, his eyes, dark and passionate with prayer, lifted up towards the stars that flashed through the black web of the ceibo tree. Then he rose, shook out his mangy cassock, spat, and went in to his Maria.

§ 6

Frank stayed with Father Cristobal in the forest pueblo of Zicxin for eleven years. The tides of life which had once threatened to engulf him now flowed smoothly by; he was safe, stranded in the sunshine, far from all the storms that had vexed him, love and loss and a country's overthrow. The Mexican revolution of '67 scarcely penetrated into the

remoter bush of Yucatan. Brigands and prowling footpads became more numerous on the *camino real*, one or two rich haciendados were found murdered among the ant-heaps, the penitenciaria was full of Indians accused of vague political crimes, the Church was disestablished and the Bishop ordered a novena in all the parishes, and Father Cristobal said Masses for the Emperor Maximilian's soul . . . gusts and catspaws were all that reached Zicxin of the great storm.

Each day was like the last. Frank rose early, put his head into a bucket of water, and, arrayed like any other Yucatecan in white linen breeches and a bright-coloured vest, with a huge Mexican straw hat, went out to feed the Father's pigs and his mule, and fetch water from the cenote. In the morning he worked in the garden and milpas, in the afternoon stretched himself out for a siesta, and in the evening was at work again till dusk. After a supper of tortillas and black beans, he would sit in the twilight, under the trees or beside the well, and watch the darkness drop over the bush and the stars spark out of it, the huge fiery stars of the tropics—Argo and Centaur, the Southern Cross and the Mock Cross. All would be still except for the throb of a far-off drum, some wake or serenata of which all other sounds had been lost in the bush. He came to link this distant drum with the twilights of Yucatan ; it was like the beating of the great tropical heart . . . in after years when he thought of Yucatan he always seemed to hear a drum throbbing on and on through the dusk.

He was interested in his work, though the languor of the place was upon him, and no doubt he would have wrought more changes in the priest's garden and maize-patch in a country where it was not always afternoon. He seldom left the village, except to prowl among the Casas de Piedras ; or sometimes, in the rainy season, when the red dust no longer flew along the road, he would walk towards the neighbouring town of San Juan de Bega, where they had bull-fights and " la baile " and other dissipations. He only once went into the town—a dreary yellow place with red

streets ankle-deep in dust, and stuffy tiendas full of huge cockroaches. The Father occasionally recommended him to take a holiday there at the fiesta, but Frank was not enticed by the bait of anise-drinking, bull-fighting, and fat Yucatecan prostitutes. His weekly wage was seldom touched, for the only temptations the village tienda had to offer were anise, habenero, and a lurid confectionery known as " pan dulce."

Occasionally he read a book, but such a treat was rare. The Father's library occupied no more than one shelf in his study-bedroom, and was confined mostly to ecclesiastical and devotional works. Frank, starved for literature, read them all—Sermons of St. Gregory, the Life and Wonderful Acts of St. Rose of Lima, and several erotic Adorations of the Virgin and the Sacred Heart. If a sheet of newspaper blew his way he eagerly read it through, and once, sent on an errand by the priest to the hacienda, he bought of the surprised planter a venerable and imperfect copy of *Don Quixote* which he found in the living-room. His only other reading during those years was the Missal, a novella published at Merida, and a Guide to Chicago left by some unknown American traveller.

Deprived of reading he became all the more hungry to write, and often had prolonged fits of scribbling, when he would cover any stray bit of paper that came into his hands. He never kept these experiments, for they were merely the expressions of a mood—a kind of mental vomiting. He wrote descriptions of the pueblo and the forest, a fanciful reconstruction of the vanished life of the Casas de Piedras, and a poem to the Indian Christ in the church, which he tore up without finishing.

§ 7

He never felt any desire to get out of the backwater into which he had drifted. The wild, active, adventure-seeking part of him was dead, and he found that his limited surroundings fulfilled all his present needs. His body was sound enough, and his mind busier than usual, but

emotionally he was exhausted. In one bitter hour he had lived through all the anguish of years, and it had worn him out—he could act and he could think, but he could not feel. This emotional anæmia had not come on all at once; for some months after the blow he had felt the bruise and agony of it, but gradually the tortured nerves had yielded to numbness, and the final shocks of his casting up, like Jonah out of the whale's belly, on the shore of Yucatan, had finished Nature's work. His heart slept and would no doubt awake one day to find the grief and bitterness as a dream—meantime, it badly needed rest.

However, he often thought of the past—not the distant past of the Isle of Oxney, before the *Margaret Monypenny* sailed from Rye, carrying a broken man to be healed and broken again—but the more recent past of Dixie, of marches and counter-marches in Tennessee, adventures in Vicksburg, with shells bursting over the Mississippi and big guns pounding at the bluffs—Chattanooga, with the cloud-wrapped mountains, the long, fighting retreat to Atlanta . . . and then his mind, without his heart, like some poor ghost without a body, would wander through the story of his love for Lorena, from its prologue of starry twilight in the little house at Vicksburg, through the adventure of her comradeship in the forest, when he knew her for flesh and blood, to the ecstasy of her in his arms—and so vivid was the memory that the scent of the crushed verbena at her breast came back through the tropical reek of the pueblo and the forest. . . . "A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse, a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters and streams. . . . Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee."

He never went back to the final tragedy. His mind stopped meekly before it. To have entered in would have raised the dead. Besides, he did not understand it; he could never tell whether his love for Lorena was the tragedy or the glory of his life. Sometimes he thought the first, for he knew it had broken him, and that he would never love or suffer very much again; but more often he

saw that the unusual clearness of his mind was due to the same cause as the dullness of his emotions—he was passing out of the fret and storm of the life of passion and feeling into the serener atmosphere of the life of thought. For the first time he was able to see his life and his struggles as a whole—like a traveller who has reached the top of a hill and can look back on the country through which he has groped and fumbled.

He saw his life as a very good thing, and he saw happiness, towards which that life had always consciously or unconsciously struggled, as merely a relative good. The real stuff of life was experience, in which sorrow and fear and disaster had as important a part to play as beauty and joy. The idea that happiness is the object and crown of a man's life was just a primitive illusion, and he had passed beyond it now. He saw his life as good, because it had been full and rich, though its chief spoils were anguish and sorrow. Life justified itself. It might be cruel, treacherous, ironic, but it was life, and pain was as much a part of it as joy. The happiness of his love for Lorena and the sorrow of its ending were both equally life and both equally good.

He saw now that the nightmare which had tortured him in the hospital at Decatur was not merely the orgasm of a brain driven sick and insane by its experiences. His life with all its varied riches of joy and sorrow was indeed a burnt-offering to a god who through his being alone could Be ; but he knew now that in that oblation he himself was not entirely without share, for though he was the victim he was also the priest, and as high priest of his own destiny was allowed to eat of the sacrifice.

Now he was at rest, stranded beyond good and evil in the ancient peace of those primeval things which had been before them. He was allowed to cool and refresh himself, to wipe the dust off his body, and taste for the first time the calm of those remote ones who have done their part in the arena and won their right to be witnesses. But he was very tired.

§ 8

Zicxin had its little starts and excitements, breaking into the monotony of weeks. There were interests outside the daily routine of the pueblo and the milpas, and though every day began the same with Frank driving out the Father's pigs—" O cochinos ! O cochinos ! "—and ended with the same contemplative hour and the distant thudding drum, in the middle time there would sometimes be adventures of outlawry and religion : the visit of a brigand to adore the Blessed Sacrament ; the selling of an Indian to pay his debts ; a wake, with its racket of drums and concertinas and flap of bare feet dancing in the dust ; the Viaticum to be taken to a distant hacienda, or perhaps to a camp of robbers—on these occasions, Frank, although schismatic, generally accompanied the Father, running along in the dust beside his mule, with a machete or Indian knife belted to him in a leather sheath.

He was Francisco now—Francisco, the priest's servant. The village people forgot that he had ever been anything else, and treated him as one of themselves when he appeared among them in his white breeches and striped red and yellow shirt, his huge straw hat, and his bare legs, with raw-hide sandals on his feet. He belonged to the upper rank of peons, for the workers in the henequen fields were naked save for their loin-cloth or maxtli, but he did not pretend to be more than a servant or he would not have gone bare-legged.

Besides working in the house and garden, he also worked in the church, struggling with the dirt of ages. He made the dim candlesticks shine, and wiped the dusty faces of the saints. Father Cristobal apparently did not object to his heretical ministrations—indeed, as time wore on he gave him more and more to do in the Sanctuary, though he never admitted him to serve the Mass.

" Francisco," he once said, " without doubt you would be doomed to hell-fire for schism but for that fresh coat of paint you gave yesterday to San Diego."

It was Frank who accompanied the Father on the glorious and holy occasion when the Bishop administered Confirmation at San Juan de Bega. They drove in a herd of little Indian boys and girls, who squatted on the discoloured stone floor, with much jingling of glass rosaries; and Frank mounted guard over them while the Father sat in the chancel with the priests of Pistí, San José, Bacalar, El Cedral, Chauac-há, Pokboe, Calotmul, and all the surrounding villages.

These priests were for the most part a gross, greasy-looking lot, the refuse of Salamanca and Madrid, driven out to be forgotten in the forests of Yucatan. Yet for all that there was something impressive in that gathering of discredited priests and half-pagan Indian children, crowded together in the mouldy old church of San Juan de Bega, where spiders spun cobwebs over the Cross, and maggots squirmed at the bottom of the holy-water stoup. It had a certain quality which a decent, cleanly Anglican Confirmation would have lacked. That quality was quite unseizable, but Frank was aware of it in soul and body. It was perhaps a sense of immense age lurking behind the seventeenth-century stucco, of immense wisdom hidden under all the superstition and gabble, and of immense beauty buried beneath the squalid tawdriness. This, he felt, was indeed The Church—a rotten limb of it, no doubt, but none the less the direct descendant and true heir of the world's forgotten wisdom. Its mysteries were far older than Christianity, they had been celebrated on the broken altars of the forest—they were as old as man's first knowledge of himself as victim and priest.

Frank had had no dealings with the Roman Church till he came to Yucatan, but he knew that he saw it at its worst, a semi-Christian and totally immoral institution, a dumping-ground for disreputable priests, and clearing-house for half-savage Indians, who brought their pagan superstitions to mix with the debased doctrine of the saints. Again and again he had heard Father Cristobal preach from the pulpit sermons in which the dregs of

Rome and the dregs of the old faith of the Xlap-pak were stirred together. Yet this seemed to him only to emphasise the continuity of the Church, its vital kinship with all the natural instincts of man. He no longer wondered how the priest could serve and adore one Mary while living in adultery with another. He had seen the brigands jump from their mules at the church door, and clatter in with their huge tasselled boots to kiss the Cross ; he had seen them kneel to ask the Father's blessing, and he knew that men who would think nothing of slitting a haciendado's throat would tremble at the thought of dying without Viaticum. The Church of Rome was not a moral system, it was a natural religion ; and perhaps this was why for the first time he felt religious instincts and cravings stir in his heart. Hitherto, all that side of him had lain asleep—grief had not roused it, nor love, nor the æsthetic mediævalism of St. Alban's, Holborn, or St. Peter's, London Docks, nor the " Dearly beloved brethren " of the Isle of Oxney. Now all the long-buried worship in him rose and poured itself out before the dusty altars of St. Miguel's, Zicxin. He attended Mass every Sunday, and sometimes on week-days too, and he would kneel for hours before the Indian Christ on the north wall, his heart growing wise as it adored.

For now he knew the secret of the mystical union which he had felt existing between the Church and the forest. When he knelt in the church and looked up at the crude and hideous effigy of the Crucified, the Indian boy all dabbled with blood, tortured and naked and broken-hearted, he saw the other side of the mystery which he had pondered in the forest by the broken altar of forgotten priests. He saw a God who did not merely absorb experience through him but shared it with him. There was not one pang of his lonely wandering life, no throb or ache or groan of his, up to that moment when the light of his eyes and the desire of his heart were taken from him at a stroke, that had not been shared by God. For if man has known the stars, so God has known the dust.

§ 9

It was a day in September, just at the end of the rainy season, when huge greenish clouds were drifting off the sky, and the red dust of the camino was pulped into a very convincing mud, that a little naked Indian boy ran out of the bush with an urgent summons to Father Cristobal. The great brigand chief, Porfirio Carbajal, who for some years now had been the terror of the roads round Zicxin, and had, it was reported, killed more rich travellers and haciendados than any other bandit in Yucatan, and had gouged out the eyes of the Jefe Politico of Chauac-há, and hanged the Jefe of Taxapan on the calabash tree outside his own jefetura—this great Porfirio now lay dying with a bullet in his chest, at his headquarters by the well of Cursuc, deep in the bush, and as a true son of the Church asked for Unction and Viaticum.

The Father had settled down to his afternoon siesta, but at this appeal he rose, untied the big crimson handkerchief he wore round his head, and called for Francisco to saddle his mule. Frank, who was also having a siesta in the cool purple shadow of the church, grumbled a little as he fetched Contrario. He resented the idea of having to forgo his much-needed afternoon sleep to risk his life in the bush, carrying the Blessed Sacrament to a robber and murderer and eye-gouger. In his disgust he felt almost Anglican. He could not picture Mr. Bellack riding fifteen miles to communicate a dying thief any more than he could imagine him living with a woman like Maria Bravo.

However, he had soon led the mule round, and buckled on his machete. Maria brought them tortillas to eat on the way—she supposed they would spend the night at the encampment—and tied a bottle of habenero to the priest's saddle-bow. They set out Indian file down the red track through the forest, the boy ahead, then Contrario with his jingling bells and the Father black and portly on his back, and last of all Frank, padding after the mule on his sandalled feet. His master treated him now much more as a

servant than he had at first ; this was chiefly due to his own taciturnity, his silence in the evenings when he might have won a footing in the household by talk or conviviality—he had preferred to sit and dream by himself in the churchyard or the Casas de Piedras, and the result was that he had gradually sunk from El Señor Americano to Francisco the peon, to whom the good priest always spoke kindly but in a manner adapted to his servitude.

To-day he padded in silence after the mule—breathing rather quickly, for he was forty-nine and getting stout, but keeping up bravely to the end of the trail. It was not safe for the Father to go without him, because, though no brigand would have touched the priest, the forest was haunted by stray prowling Indians who would not hesitate to attack a lonely traveller, though they were mostly too faint-hearted to engage a couple.

The brigand's camp was pitched round one of the limestone wells which were scattered in the bush—ancient sacrificial pools where girls used to be offered up to the rain-god. Father Cristobal heard Porfirio's dying confession without a tremor, though it might have shaken the nerves of any man, and gave him absolution and the last rites of Holy Church. The robber swallowed the Host and died, and no doubt went to Paradise like an earlier thief.

Frank and the Father spent the night in the camp, in a welter of dirt and dogs and jigger-fleas. The next morning they rose early, and after a breakfast of tortillas and black coffee set out on their return journey to Zicxin, the priest carrying with him as his sacerdotal due a magnificent rosary of gold and emeralds which Porfirio had once torn off the neck of a Meridan actress travelling to El Cedral—with sundry attentions from which the lady did not recover.

The sun rushed up into the baked blue sky, which even at night seemed to glow with imprisoned heat, and the air grew damp and thick with the miasma of the bush which rose in walls of webbed and matted green each side of the trail. In Frank's nostrils was the heavy, sour-milk smell of the tropics, and in his ears the forest's burden of silence,

broken only by the mule's shuffling tread and the flap of his own feet in the dust. The Father had gone to sleep, his large bulk swaying dangerously in the saddle, but Frank knew from experience he would not fall. He himself was almost asleep—his ambling walk almost mechanical, so too his flicking off of the garrapadas before they had time to burrow into his flesh. Therefore it was like awakening from a dream when he suddenly found himself staring down at what looked like a big black crumpled pillow, beside which Contrario stood with empty saddle.

Dismayed and bewildered, he turned the Father over on his back. His mouth was open, and twitched a little at the corners, his eyes were open too, and suffused, while his face wore a stupid, suffering expression, quite different from its normal cast.

Frank held the bottle of habenero to his lips; after a time he sucked at it, then said faintly—

"Francisco . . . I—I feel sick . . . help me get home."

Frank suggested that he should take Contrario and ride into Zicxin for help, but the Father refused to be left.

"I want to get home . . . I want Maria . . . I feel sick."

He was shivering as if with an ague, and Frank knew that some sudden tropical fever had seized him and would no doubt run its racking course through cold and heat and aching and vomiting and thirst. He had complained of headache the night before, but had seemed quite well when they left the camp. He had evidently been suddenly overtaken by stupor and faintness, and had probably no very clear idea of what had happened. The only thing to do was to get him home to Maria's nursing and the water of the village well. Frank managed to hoist him astride the mule, where he sat lolling over the peak of the saddle, his rosary still clenched in his fat hand. All the time Contrario had stood quite still, profiting by the occasion to eat Frank's straw hat, which had rolled between his forelegs.

They went on very slowly, the Father leaning sideways on his servant's shoulder, one of Frank's arms round him,

while the other held the bridle. He remembered how he had ridden that way himself to Zicxin eleven years ago. He was fond of Father Cristobal, and hoped he was not going to be very ill ; but he looked bad enough—the expression of suffering and stupor increased, and after a time he began to vomit, which so exhausted him that for a while Frank feared he would collapse before they came to Zicxin.

At last, however, the big yellow belfry showed above the trees, and soon the adobe huts could be seen clustering round it, like mushrooms at the foot of an oak. Maria was standing in the garden of the Presbytery, for she had been expecting the priest a long time, and was growing anxious. Directly she saw them she knew that something was wrong, and the Indian blood in her prevailed, as she ran towards them wailing and wringing her hands.

Rainger spoke to her sharply, forgetting he was the servant. He ordered her to prepare the Father's bed and see that there was plenty of water in the house. The priest was almost unconscious as Frank hauled him in, and his skin was burning, with a yellow tinge which told that he had drawn the worst ticket in all the tropical bag of death.

He did not speak as they undressed him and put him to bed in the dark, earth-floored room beyond the kitchen, where the paltry little row of devotional manuals proclaimed the extent of the Church's learning in Zicxin. Then, when Frank told Maria that he was going to ride in to San Juan to fetch the doctor, he murmured thickly, " No—fetch the priest."

" I will go for the doctor first," said Frank.

But Father Cristobal became violently agitated, and cried out for the priest ; and Maria, with the tears streaming over her worn, brown face, said—

" He can die without the doctor, but he cannot die without the priest."

" He's not going to die," said Frank roughly—for he was angry with Maria because she wailed in the sick man's ears. But he doubted his own words ; the sudden onset of the fever was a bad sign, and even a moderate attack

would be dangerous to a man of the Father's habit. He was now vomiting every few minutes, and his tongue was swollen and coated with black. Frank gave an Indian boy —one of the servers of the church—fifty centavos to fetch the priest from the nearest village of Calotmul, while he himself rode into San Juan de Bega to fetch the doctor.

It was dusk when he returned, and, as he feared, there was little or nothing to do. Yellow fever sometimes takes three or four days to finish off its victims, sometimes as many hours, and it was making short work of poor Father Cristobal Sanchez. When the doctor arrived the black vomit was upon him ; he was delirious, and his cries could be heard down the village as far as the tienda. Maria crouched on the floor beside his bed, rocking herself to and fro and holding his hand against her forehead, while the priest of Calotmul—a gentle, bald-headed old man, the reasons of whose exile in the bush were not as obvious as in most cases—knelt in a corner repeating the prayers for the dying.

As Frank had feared, there was little that the doctor could do. He took from Father Cristobal a few ounces of blood, and ordered wet cloths to be put round his head. Then he rode back to San Juan, for his own child was ill, and he did not care to leave her for a dissipated old priest whom El Vomito had doomed.

Frank and Maria and the priest of Calotmul sat all night in the Father's room. The stifling heat died out of the thatch, and a cool wind blew in at the unglazed window, while the dew began to dip heavily off the eaves In the small hours of the morning the fever went, leaving Father Cristobal in the final collapse. He lay motionless, save for an involuntary twitching of his face and limbs ; he was conscious now, and occasionally he asked for some particular prayer or hymn to be read to him. He was at peace, for he had been given the last rites and consolations of the Church, and in his dry yellow hand he held the hand of the woman he loved. No memories or regrets of past years and past sins came to plague him, for the Church, through the voice of the priest of Calotmul, had absolved him of them all.

Frank sat at the head of the bed, fanning him with a palm leaf fan. He felt shaken and dazed. He had little thought, as he trotted through the bush in the wake of the priest who bore the Sacrament to the dying thief, that in twenty-four hours the Father himself would be receiving the last rites. Now all was over, the sinner's peace was made—without any storms or soul-searchings, just a few monotonous words, a touch of sacred oil, and a wafer on the tongue. The dying man lay very still. In his right hand he held Maria's, in the left his coloured medallion of the Virgin. All was silence save for the droning of the Father from Calotmul and the steady drip of the dew off the eaves.

Father Cristobal died when the sky was green with the dawn. The exact moment of his death was uncertain, for he died very peacefully, almost without a sigh. It was no doubt hard for him to die in the midst of his age and strength and love, but the Church he had served and in whose harness he had fallen down, made his passing easy, and the woman who for years had been his lover and servant and faithful friend was with him to the last. The last word he uttered was "Maria," but no one knew whether it was meant for his left hand or his right.

§ 10

For the whole of the next day, Frank and Maria were like people in a dream, dazed by the blow which had fallen so suddenly on them. But the quick ritual of a funeral in Yucatan soon woke them up, one to action, the other to uncontrolled, desperate grief. The Father was buried on the evening of the day he had died. No grave was dug, for no spade could go deeper than a couple of feet in the soil of rocks and sand. The coffin rested on the earth, and a dome of cement was plastered over it, with a big stone at the head and another at the feet. All the village was present, and wailed and sobbed and rubbed sand in its hair, afterwards crowding into the Presbytery for the wake which was to be held that night.

All night long the Indians sang and danced in the

kitchen, drinking anise and habenero, eating "pan dulce," and dancing the tango to the rattle and wheeze of drums and concertinas. Frank sat with Maria in the bedroom. She had given way utterly to her grief, and lay stretched on the floor, her long black hair straggling over her back, her shoulders arching and heaving while she uttered little moaning sounds like a quail. Somehow he felt very much a stranger that night, sitting alone in his sorrow and silence, while on one side of him the Indians danced, and on the other Maria moaned and struggled like an animal in pain. Because Father Cristobal had died the Indians danced, Maria wailed, and Frank sat in silence. After all, he supposed, his Yucatecan habits were but skin deep—if he had been Yucatecan to the core he would now be either dancing or moaning, banging the floor with either his feet or his head.

He wondered what he should do, now that he had lost his master—take service with some one else, he supposed. He would not stay at Zicxin, he would go and have a look at some other part of the country, perhaps even wander as far as Mexico. He had been told by the priest of Calotmul that, while he had been away at San Juan, the Father had expressed a wish that Francisco should have the emerald rosary which he had been given by Carbajal. This was a rich bequest, for the Paters were emeralds and the Aves aquamarines, while the Cross was of purest crystal. He had also saved a couple of hundred Mexican dollars out of his wages—even fifty centavos a week will at last pile into a fortune if there is nothing to spend them on piecemeal.

There was no doubt that he was rich for the present and the immediate future, and could if he chose go and look at the world south of Yalpas or across the river Hondu. As for Maria, the priest had left her the whole of his not inconsiderable savings. She was going to her brother at Campeachy—he would be glad enough to receive her now that she was a woman of fortune, for he had a wife and seven children, and made a doubtful living at the docks.

The next day she was a little calmer, and, helped by Frank, cleaned up the litter of the wake, and prepared the Presbytery for its new occupant. There was little or no furniture for her to take away, but she packed up all the Father's images, rosaries, and books of devotion—except for a little thumbed manual called *Hymns of the Love of Mary*, published at Seville, which she asked Frank to take because the priest had always prayed for his conversion—"not but that she was quite sure Francisco was a good Catholic, as she had often seen him praying in the church, and knew that he always bowed down to the Host."

A few days later Father Cristobal's successor arrived to look at the Presbytery. He was a dark, handsome man, scarcely over thirty, with huge black eyes and beautiful, cruel lips. The Indian women peeped at him from their doorways, and said that they felt sure the holy Father would be good to them.

He stayed two days at Zicxin, said Mass each morning and played cards with Frank in the evening. He came from Valladolid, and told Maria wonderful stories of the bull-fights and the processions in the Cathedral. He did not expect to come to live at the Presbytery for another fortnight, so Frank and Maria had ample time to make their preparations for departure. Frank's consisted chiefly of a thorough cleansing of the church. He washed the floor, dusted and repaired the seats, cleared the cobwebs off the side-altars and the red dust out of the Sanctuary. He was sorry to leave the church of the Indian Saviour, of the primitive, weed-choked mysteries of life, and he spent his last days there, scouring and cleaning, or with a few cheap colours reviving the faded luridness of the saints. He gave the Indian Christ a new coat of blood before he left. But sometimes, after dusk, he would creep down the forest track to the Casas de Piedras, to the silence of the broken courts now bathed in the rusty light of the tropical moon. He would sit and watch the shadows swim over them, and the moon drench

the tangled vegetation that stuffed their alley-ways. And a great peace and confidence would come over him, for he knew that however scientific and complicated life might be it must inevitably return at last to the simple primitive things from which it came.

§ 11

Early in October Frank and Maria drove out of Zicxin in a mule-cart, piled with all their worldly goods, which consisted chiefly of Maria's saints and angels, a veritable Kingdom of Heaven tied up in a dust-sheet. She was calmer now in her grief, but she cried as they left the village, for it had been her home for twenty years.

The Indian women stood in their doorways and waved their hands to the departing couple. They wondered if Maria had become Francisco's woman now that she had lost the priest. The peons on their way to the henequen fields cried "Adios!" and "Seas feliz!" which made Maria cry more than ever.

It was some forty miles to Campeachy, and the mules—Contrario and a hireling from the jefe—were not particularly good goers, even if the road had admitted it. However, by starting early, Frank hoped to arrive before night. He would see Maria safely to her brother's house, and go himself to the inn. He purposely left his future quite vague—he rather enjoyed the prospect of a little aimless wandering. They drove for some miles in silence, except for Frank's continual cry to the lazy mules—"O mula! mula!"—and Maria's subdued weeping. During the first week or so her grief had been without tears—she had screamed and sobbed and thrown herself about, but never wept. Of late, however, she had cried continually, and the tears had worn dark channels under her eyes.

To-day there was something in her broad bunchy figure as it sat huddled beside him that touched him strangely. He felt that he longed to comfort this middle-aged woman, who, with her youth and beauty gone, had suddenly been called upon to give up the love which had survived them

both. He remembered with a queer little ache how the best years of his life had been given to a woman like her—stoutish, homely, past her youth, a simple child of nature and the earth . . . it was odd that Maria should remind him of Maggie.

"Maria, mi querida," he said tenderly, "don't cry. I know you feel wretched and lonely, but I am sure there are years of happiness still before you—and Father Cristobal would not like to see you cry."

"He cannot see me," she moaned.

"But if he could, you would not like to grieve him?"

Her sorrow grew hysterically loud—

"Oh, Francisco! the good man! What have I not lost in him—Father and priest and husband and friend! If you had ever loved and lost, Francisco, you would know what I suffer."

"I have loved, Maria, and lost too."

"Ay di mi! poor Francisco!" He saw that he had touched her simple heart, and her curiosity too.

"Yes," he said, "I have felt what you suffer now, and that is why I am so sorry for you."

"What was her name?" she asked naïvely.

"Maggie."

The next minute he wondered why he had said Maggie instead of Lorena. It was probably because Maria was a little like the stolid, homely English love whom he had forgotten for fifteen years.

"Tell me about her?" asked Maria, and in order to take her thoughts from her grief, and to relieve the monotony of that dragging journey over the red dust of Southern Yucatan, Frank told her about his early life in the Isle of Oxney, about Maggie Coalbran, who was afterwards Maggie Harman; and all the long-drawn tragedy of those years when he had served and waited for Maggie like Jacob for Rachel, only to lose her at last.

"But she is still alive?" said Maria when he had finished.

"I do not know."

" Why don't you go back to England and see ? Go back to England and see if your Maggie is alive."

" I don't want to go back to England. I have forgotten the ways of it. Besides, even if Maggie is alive she is married to some one else."

" How do you know ? You told me she was married to an old man. He is very likely dead by now. Why don't you go back and see if your Maggie is alive and free ? You are only fifty years old—you can still be happy with her."

Frank shook his head, and with a smart pull of the reins saved the cart from turning over on an ant-heap.

" You don't know what you say, child. I tell you I have forgotten the ways of England ; and even if Maggie were a widow she might not want to have anything to do with me, nor I with her."

" Don't you love her any more ? "

" Dio mio ! I cannot say. I have loved more deeply and more passionately since then. I don't know why I should think of her now."

§ 12

At dusk they came within sight of the sea, and as the Southern Cross burned out of the heavy, cobalt sky, Frank drove the mule-cart into Campeachy and stopped at the door of Maria's brother, in a street behind the docks. The brother gave her a warm welcome, and took her in, with her bundle of saints. He also invited Frank to supper and offered to sling a hammock for him. But Rainger preferred to stop at the inn, and though he sat down in the smoky little kitchen, among fowls and cats and children, and ate an almost mummified turtle-steak, washed down by some very good black coffee, he afterwards insisted on going away. He kissed Maria's hand, and promised to be round again in the morning, then drove to a rackety inn in the next street, where he found excellent stabling for his mule and very nearly as good quarters for himself.

The inn consisted of a front room—where one could

drink anise, habenero, brandy, and even the Mexican pulque, like sweet soapy beer—and a back room where swung as many hammocks as the guests demanded or the place would hold. To-night it was not very crowded—a docker, two seamen, and a trio of strolling players, who played the guitar and the tambourine in the Plaza. Frank turned in at once, for he had had a long day; but to his surprise he found he could not sleep. The players snored, and the docker had drunk too much pulque and was sick, but normally he could have slept through worse than that. His wakefulness was probably due to the fact that it was eleven years since he had slept anywhere but in the little back room at the Presbytery, where through the glassless window he could see the leaves of a cactus shining grey in the starlight, and smell the dew as it dripped off the thatch. Here the window opened on a blank wall, and there was a smell of docks, and the sea-life of the tropics—thick, stagnant, oozy—brine and the sweetness of rotten fruit mixed in a stew of windless heat.

Perhaps that was what kept him awake—the distant smell of the sea, joined with the strangeness of his surroundings. It told him that he was a wanderer, among wanderers, with nowhere to go, and no one to care where he went. For the first time the vague, vagabond future he had planned seemed lonely and attractionless. He would roam about till all his money was spent, then take service again, probably on some hacienda where the peons were flogged, and the life was very different from the lazy, strolling freedom of the Presbytery. After all, though vagabondage may do very well for a boy or a young man, who has many years to stuff with experience before he has won the right to settle down, a man of fifty, who has wandered all his life and eaten to surfeit the knowledge of good and evil, wants in his heart nothing but a chimney corner and a home.

He thought of the only place that had been his home—Moon's Green, on the hill above Wet Level, with the two tall oasts, and the house with the apples on the wall, and

the windows that looked over the marshes to the Weald of Kent. How far off it seemed now, as he lay in the stew of the tropical night, in the country where all colours were glaring, where the sunshine blazed, where the earth was red, where life teemed and swarmed and multiplied, and the woods ate up the wisdom of a thousand years. He was hundreds and hundreds of miles away from that land of pale misty sunshine, damp emerald grass, and grudging fields. A great tide of nostalgia swept over him. He hid his face in his rag-stuffed pillow, and clenched his hands against his head.

What had made him suddenly homesick after fifteen years? Was it the dirty, stuffy room?—the big cockroaches that ran with a scratching noise over the floor? Maria's words on the drive to Campeachy? or the distant smell of the sea? He did not know. All he knew was that quite suddenly he wanted to go home—that he would go home.

He remembered Maria's words: "Why don't you go back to England and see if your Maggie is alive?"

It was strange that he should turn to Maggie now, but none the less it was true that for the last ten hours she had loomed larger in his thoughts than lost Lorena. Was this because she was the simple, primitive thing in his life, to which after all his experiences and wanderings it must return, as his body must return to the earth? Maggie . . . he tried to picture her as she was now, a woman of fifty, probably stout, with all her beauty gone. Yet he found himself hungering for her, to hear her talk in the old Kentish way, to see her look dreamily out over her folded hands at the cloudy Kentish hills. Whether she was a widow or wife would make no difference to him now, for all the passion in him, all that was wild and youthful and burning in love, had been drawn out of him in those few ardent weeks long years ago, and he had only sober things to give her now, such as she might receive.

He had loved, and he had known the supreme ecstasy of man, and it had gone from him, like a falling star, which

for one moment lights up the sky, then drops into the woods and is lost. But the old homely things remained—the woods, and the fields and lanes, and the ploughed earth ; they could not fail or fade, though he might forget them as he looked up at the stars. After all, the night is rather cold, and the stars are very far away, and it is good to turn into the warm house where the lamp is burning. . . .

He would go back to Kent, to the cold, rainy mornings, to the pale cloudy sky, to sweet muddy lanes that smelt of leaves and rain. The wind that puffs up the Rother at dusk seemed to blow into the gasping heat of that room . . . he could smell the hops and the apples, the soft drizzling showers. What was the world to him south of Yalpas and the Rio Hondu ? His home lay in the north, on that green hill far away, where the sun was never hot, and the sky was seldom blue, where all the colours were washed and pale, and the earth was stingy, doling her harvests. He would go back to England and see the mist and the green grass again before he died.

His mind was made up. Father Cristobal's rosary, which surely the good Father would want him to sell, now ought to bring him enough money to pay his passage and leave a little over for immediate expenses. The very next morning he would set off for Vera Cruz, strike his bargain and book his passage. The cart and the mules were to be taken back to Zicxin by the planter of the hacienda El Redemptor Mundo, who was returning from Campeachy in a couple of days. He was free to go where he pleased.

He felt a welcome drowsiness creep over him when he realised that in six months from now he might be lying in a wide soft English bed, with a white English pillow under his head, smelling of washing and ironing. He could recall, too, the faint scent of old feathers that filled his bed at home. . . . He nestled his cheek against his hand, and shut his eyes. Then a half-forgotten scene swam into his memory—he and Maggie standing together in the farmyard, with the moon looking over the humped roofs of the barns,

out of a tremulous green sky. He was saying to her : " I'd come to you from the ends of the earth." . . .

§ 13

A fortnight later, the screw steamer *Trinidad* was gliding out of the harbour at Vera Cruz. She carried a cargo of hemp and a few passengers. Frank, dressed in what the Jew of the Via Angusta behind the wharfs had called " European clothes," watched the port as it glided away from the *Trinidad*—all the huddle of wharf and warehouses, beyond them the cool white villas among the orange groves of the upper town, and further still the towering cone of Orizaba, white as fleece against the stone-blue sky. It was dusk, and a fresh little breeze from the land was blowing after them the scent of rotting oranges and the big cargo of limes with which a five-masted schooner was being laden.

Frank was relieved now that his choice was irrevocable, He had still found himself eager for it on the morning after its first making, but in the time which elapsed between his stay at Campeachy and a convenient sailing from Vera Cruz, he had had his doubts and qualms, almost his revocation. Sometimes he told himself he was a fool thus to go back to England in the hopes of finding what he had left there. The Isle of Oxney was not likely to have stayed quite unchanged for fifteen years—his friends would have left or died, the familiar places would be altered, improved, pulled down. But once he had heard the call, he could not forget it. He had heard the call of England, like so many other of her scattered sons, and was going back to her as he was going back to Maggie, from the ends of the earth.

After all, though many things would have changed, many would still remain ; though Maggie and Dave and the others might be dead or gone, and strangers at Mockbeggar and Moon's Green, still he would see before he died the English earth, turned up for ploughing, and the English sky with its grey drifting clouds and pale sun. And it was

quite probable that Maggie and Dave would not be gone, that he would see his old love again, and sit with her in the twilight after the long day's parting.

The darkness was creeping over the sea, and he could only faintly make out the shore with its palms and orange groves. A bell had rung for the passengers to come below to supper, but he would not go down till he had seen the last of the continent where he had suffered and loved so much. As he thought of all the storms he had weathered there—the war between North and South, love and loss and despair and shipwreck and servitude—a faint call from the past seemed to come out to him over the water, as a call from the future had come to him over the water two weeks ago. To the New World he was leaving belonged all that was best and most vital in his life. In the New World of America he had seen a great cause die in fire and blood; there too he had known a love compared to which the love to which he was now hastening home was as the earth to the stars. He bowed his head over his hands, as he sat there crouched in the darkness, and the tears pricked the back of his eyes—his last tears for Lorena.

But the next minute he pulled himself together, and stood up. The coast had vanished now, swallowed up in the night, only the white cone of Orizaba, still faintly pink with the sunset it alone could see, hung like some mysterious unearthly phantom in the dusk of the blue sky.

> "It matters little now, Lorena,
> The past is the eternal past."

And because it was eternal it could be forgotten. Those dead years were forgotten now, he would not wake them, he would let them sleep on with their buried love and anguish. He turned his back on the pale hanging peak among the stars, and looked steadily out to sea, to where the old world and the old loves lay.

PART VI

THE ISLE OF OXNEY

§ 1

THE River Rother wound its pale thread through the November fogs that drifted along the marshes. The sky was a shining wash of blue, smudged with grey, and a faint sun struggled through the smeeth, every now and then flooding down a tremulous amber light upon the fields, showing in sunny patches beneath the mists the clear damp green of the meadows, and the furrowed clay of the newly turned ploughlands.

The air was moist and rather cold, and Frank shivered a little as his horse—hired from the London Trader at Rye—walked soberly up Wittersham Hill, the mud making sticky, sucking noises under his hoofs. The " European clothes " were not adapted to an English November, and it was many years since he had been in a climate that did not encourage nakedness. But beyond turning up his collar and buttoning his coat over his chest he did not trouble much about the chill. He was too busy looking about him, at the marsh, dykes, woods, lanes, and farms, and accustoming himself to the glorious and unexpected truth that—nothing had changed.

Nothing had changed—so he need not have lived those anxious hours between Campeachy and Vera Cruz, telling himself that most of the ancient landmarks would be gone : that perhaps Wittersham would have broken out into villadom : that the marsh would probably have been drained and a railway jogged into the silence of the weald : that Dave and Maggie and Eliza and the others would be changed or dead : and that he had far better stay where

he was in Mexico. Nothing had changed—it was the same old road up Wittersham Hill, rutty between its hedges of hazel and thorn, with a lavant oozing down the ditch with a hollow, trickling sound—the same farms broke up the grass and clay of the fields with their red barns and black oasts: Old Turk Farm, Birdskitchen, Chapel Bank, and Ham Green were there unchanged, with the same old spinneys round them, little woods of ash and oak that seemed almost like toy woods to him now. And the people had not changed—at least not the people he had come to see. Mr. Bellack was dead, and so was old Mrs. Coalbran, but Dave and Eliza were still living at Moon's Green, and Maggie was still at Mockbeggar.

Maggie was a widow, as he had thought likely, considering how much older Harman was than she. He had first known it at Rye, where, passing up the station road to his inn, he had seen a prosperous-looking dairy shop, with "Mrs. Harman—Mockbeggar Farm Dairy" painted over it. The use of her own name pointed to independence, and when he reached the London Trader, where he had engaged a room for the night, he found a letter from Dave waiting for him, which confirmed his suspicion. Harman had died eight years ago, and Maggie was running the farm very successfully with the help of her youngest son. This news did not make much difference to Frank, for he had come back to England independent of any thought of marriage—after all he and Maggie were both over fifty. He was more pleased to gather from the squeezed and dismembered phrases of Dave's letter, evidently dictated to Dave's Eliza, that Moon's Green would be pleased to welcome him, that he had been an unaccountable long time in furrin parts, and it was to be hoped he hadn't got "the rheumatiz same as me—in my back it's sometimes cruel."

He came to the top of Wittersham Hill, and turned into the village, past the stocks. Here again was the same immutability—the grey stone church, mellow with weather and age, rising above the trees where the rooks' old nests blotched the tracery of the leafless branches, and the squab

red and yellow houses, with the roofs sprawling down their backs to windward. Another shop had been opened near the Plough, and the Parsonage looked much smarter and neater than in Mr. Bellack's day. Otherwise the place was the same as when he and Maggie had run in on their bare legs on Saturdays to buy sweets.

He turned down the lane towards the marsh, past Boldshaves, with the oast growing out of the roof, and Mopesden Wood where the ghosteses were. The old horse went slowly, and Frank did not want to hurry—any speed would seem a violation of that calm in which everything stood still. His heart was warm with peace and eagerness, as he strained his eyes over the hedges for a first sight of Moon's Green. He was coming home at last, tired after long years' wandering, to end his life where it had begun. It was not a glorious return ; there he sat on his hired horse, poor and shabby, only a few pounds in his pocket, and all his possessions in the carpet bag strapped in front of him. Probably he was what men called a failure, but he did not care, for he was coming home, and he alone knew what his life had been.

The road wound on between the bare hedges of thorns and twigs, past the damp, mould-smelling meadows of the Forstal and the leafless orchards of Mopesden Farm. The sunlight spattered the road in faint occasional showers, then faded back into the grey. Over the bare branches of the trees, the sky hung pale and blue, with clouds above the hills. . . . At last he came to the bend of the lane, and could see the old red mottled house of Moon's Green with its steep-roofed barns and the two oast-houses that stood like sentinels, looking over the marsh towards the hills of Kent.

§ 2

The sound of the horse's hoofs, crunching and sucking on the drive, brought David Coalbran to the seldom used front door. He was terribly bent, and the hand he held out to Frank was gnarled and knotted as an oak-stick.

"So here you are, Frank. I'm justabout glad to see you after this long wile."

Frank was touched by the cordiality of his welcome. Dave's deformed hand trembled as it lay in his, and over his shoulder looked Dave's Eliza, all a-grin.

"Were you surprised to hear from me?" asked Rainger.

"I reckon we were—and a furrin stamp too."

"I thought I'd like to see England again after all these years, and lay my bones at home."

"Reckon that wöan't be yet awhile—you look valiant."

"I'm pretty well—the hot climate made me a bit flabby, but I picked up on the voyage, and now I'm as strong as a lad, except for this arm."

"Did you break it?" asked Dave, inspecting the stiff, bow-shaped limb.

"Got a bullet through it in the American war."

"Oh, I wur disremembering you'd bin in a war—but that's over a long time, I reckon."

"Eleven years."

"And did your side win?" asked Dave's Eliza brightly.

"No, it was beaten."

"Wot a pity! But never you mind, as it's all over. Come in now and have your dinner—I've a prime bit o' beef fur you."

"Phil!" called Dave. "Phil! Come and täake the horse."

A fine nut-brown lad came out of the Dutch barn, and looked shyly at Frank.

"This is my son—born a year after you went away. Shäake hands wud your uncle, Phil—leastways you äun't his uncle, but I doan't know what to call you."

"Uncle will do very well," said Frank, smiling. "I've always felt like a brother to you, Dave, and to poor Tom. who lies out there."

"Ah, poor Tom!" said Dave and Eliza together, with a simultaneous shake of their heads, like two children reciting a verse.

Frank unstrapped his bag from the saddle, as Phil took the horse to lead it away.

" I reckon you're having the rest of your luggage sent after you," said Dave.

Frank laughed. " No—this is all I have."

Dave and Eliza looked blank.

" But I thought as how Mexicer wur full of gold-mines ? " said the latter, after a pause. " When we got your letter, Ernie Boorman up at the Plough said as how them furrin parts wur full of gold-mines, and as how you wur sure to have made your fortun."

" Instead of which, I've come back with exactly five pounds in my pocket."

The Coalbrans looked much taken aback, but David's next words were to suggest that they should go in and have some dinner.

So once again Frank found himself in the old low kitchen at Moon's Green where, as a boy, he and Maggie had eaten their porridge together, and as a young man he had snatched his hurried meals in the midst of the day's work. The rafters, grimed with smoke, seemed to sag towards the brick floor, and there was the same old settle, pulled half way round the fire, and the big hearth which smelled faintly and sweetly of cinders and old stones.

" I reckon you find everything very much changed," said Dave, seeing him look about him.

" On the contrary, I was thinking how little anything had changed."

" Didn't you notice the new curtains ? " asked Dave's Eliza in a disappointed voice.

" And the new roof to the Dutch barn's bin put on since you left," said Dave. " How can you say as naun's changed ? "

" I mean, on the whole—in the Isle of Oxney—as I rode across this morning it seemed as if everything was exactly as I'd left it."

" There's a new Parson come to the Rectory and a new landlord to the Plough ; and there's a grocer's shop and a Parish Hall—they've built oast-houses at Ethnam, and an

extra wing on to the dwelling-house at Old Turk, and I've drained fifteen acres of Rother snape—if you call that 'nothing changed——'" And Dave's voice grew shrill with grievance.

"I expect I'll find more changes when I look about me," said Frank, chewing happily at his first meal of English beef.

"While I think of it," said Eliza, "Maggie Harman wants you to go over and see her some day. We töald her as you wur a-cöaming back, and she reckoned as how thur 'ud be no harm in your seeing each other now."

"I reckon not," said Frank.

"She's changed, has Maggie," continued Dave's Eliza. "She's grown a bit more stout than some men 'ud like." She herself was thin as a greyhound, her fuzzy and still plentiful red hair crowning queerly her white, pointed face.

"Frank's a bit on the stout side too," said Dave. "Reckon you haven't starved in furrin parts."

"No, but I've had the same food every day for eleven years. This beef is delicious, Eliza."

He found conversation with these two a trifle difficult. He saw, with a little pang of disappointment, that they were not in the least interested in his adventures in foreign lands—they did not even seem to care to hear about Tom Coalbran's death. Besides, he was only just growing accustomed to speaking English again—for eleven years he had spoken nothing but the mongrel Spanish of Yucatan, and now when he returned to the old language, he found that his thoughts moved too quickly for his tongue, with the result that he often found himself halting and stuttering for a word. So perhaps, after all, it was lucky that Dave and Eliza were far more eager to tell him their news than to hear his—the new roof, the new field, the new tenant of Mopesden, Maggie's success with her milk-round, the steam reaper which Coalbran had hired last harvest, were far more interesting to them than the fall of Dixie or the ways of the backwoods of Yucatan. When young Phil came in, hungry and glowing, smelling of milk and manure, he asked to be "told about a battle," but by that time the meal was over,

and Dave said that he would take Frank upstairs and show him his room.

It was his old room—new papered, as Dave proudly pointed out, though the " newness " had materially worn off in the course of eight years. There was the shelf which had once held his books, the wide comfortable bed he had longed for from across the sea, and the window that looked away over the marsh to where the afternoon sun hung foggy and yellow over the woods of Lossenham.

He set down his bag and went and looked out of the window.

" It's good to be home," he said to Dave.

" And döan't think, Frank, as we äunt pleased to have you, though of course your not having no money mäakes it different—your staying on here, I mean. The old farm scarce pays its way in these cheap times."

Frank's face fell : " You want me to go soon ? "

" I never said that. But if you'd had that fortun we thought you had, you cud have kept this room fur ever, hired it of us, like."

" Would you let me stay if I give you a hand with the farm ? "

Dave brightened.

" Well, I've naun agäunst that. We're two men short, and I remember as how you used to be valiant wud the ploughing."

" I've kept my hand in too—not ploughing, but digging, and looking after stock. Except for the three or four years I was a soldier I've been working on the land all the time I've been away. However, we'll talk that over later. I guess I'll unpack now."

David left him, and Frank opened his carpet bag and took out his few belongings—two changes of linen, bought at Vera Cruz, and the little book of Father Cristobal's which Maria had given him. He put it on the shelf, as the rudiment of a future library.

The sun poured into the room and gave a warm tarnished look to the furniture and yellowed the sheets and pillows

of the bed. He bent over it and buried his face in the pillows—there was the same faint smell of old feathers. . . .

The wheel of life had brought him completely round—the end and the beginning were the same.

§ 3

The next evening Frank walked over to Mockbeggar to see Maggie. He chose the evening as the least busy part of the day. In the morning he had helped young Phil with the horses, and then once more he had felt his hands clench over the smooth handles of the plough, holding it down against the wet November sods, which dragged at the share, as he drove it through them, looking over the horse's back at the mild pale sun. . . . It had been like the old days, the days which he had lived through tense with the thought of the evening—and in the evening he had walked over to Mockbeggar with an aching, eager heart, to see Maggie, as he was going to see her now.

This evening his heart did not ache, nor was it particularly eager. He looked forward with pleasant serenity to seeing her. He wondered if she had altered much. Eliza had called her stout, but she had always been inclined that way. No doubt she was happier now than in the days of her yoke ; she would have lost her fretfulness, and her slow distrustful ways. Simple and profound she would always be, and probably now she was solid too, a woman of sober, ruminative thoughts.

As he walked between the bare spiny hedges, with their clanging scents of earth and rain, the ghost of his dead self seemed to run beside him in the way—a pale, lame, gasping thing, full of strange dead hopes and fears, ecstasies and bewilderments he could not recall. When he thought of those days with their slow fever, and the days that had followed them with their clash and despair, he knew that the best of his life was still to be. In the past he had experienced and experimented, adventured and suffered, but before him now lay the quiet days when

he should sit in this pleasant place and count over the treasures he had won. The past was the one immutable treasure-house—the only place where neither moth or rust corrupteth nor thieves break through and steal.

At last he came to Mockbeggar, on the white marsh road to Barrow's Land. The farm looked newer and trimmer than in the old days. The sun gleamed in the turrets of the freshly-tarred oasts, and the casements of the dwelling-house had been painted white and hung with sprigged curtains. In the yard he met a red-faced, freckled boy of about fifteen, who was going out with a gun and a spaniel to shoot coneys. Frank asked him for Mrs. Harman, guessing at the same time that he was her son. The young man also, apparently, was guessing, for he said—

"Are you Mr. Rainger from Moon's Green?"

Frank nodded.

"I don't know you, but my mother has been expecting you all day. I'm Bill Harman."

So this was the baby that had been born while Frank was in America.

"Is your mother well?" he asked him.

"Oh, she's in valiant heart. Mother"—they had come to the house door—"Mother! here's Mr. Rainger."

"I'm coming," sounded a distant voice, and it was then Frank realised that after all he was not so very old and sober, for he felt an unmistakable thrill. It was fifteen years since he had heard Maggie's voice, and then it had been hoarse and choked with weeping. . . . His heart began to beat loudly, his pulses hammered, he was almost the boy who had listened trembling for that voice in long-past years.

The next minute a substantial figure showed itself in the passage . . . dark and indistinct, it was at last clear on the doorstep, in the flooding yellow of the sunset. He was looking into a face worn and lined, but infinitely good, with its weather-beaten red, and smooth grey bands of hair. He could smell the smell of her apron in which she had been carrying apples . . . he felt her rough, kind hand in

his, and heard her say, " Come in, Frank—I'm justabout glad to see you."

He followed her into the kitchen, looking up at the high cave-like roof and beams where the wind had howled. There was a new and comfortable arm-chair in front of the fire-place, which was now fitted with a fine, modern range. Maggie made him sit down, and brought him a glass of beer.

" Just to refresh you after your walk. You look hot—and we're neither of us as young as we were, Frank."

" You haven't changed a bit."

" Not changed ! Nonsense ! I've put on two stone in weight, and my hair's gone grey."

But she was so unmistakably Maggie that he still almost believed she had not changed.

" You're just the same, Frank," she continued—" you've the same twinkly eyes and red hair—a liddle bit grey on temples, I see. I lik your fäace."

He laughed. " That's kind of you."

He felt completely at his ease with her. Her simple, motherly mood was the very mood in which he would have chosen first to meet her. Like the other inhabitants of the Isle of Oxney, she did not seem absorbingly interested in his life in " furrin parts," and after a few general questions, passed on to her own news.

The last ten years had been for her years of great prosperity. Her husband had, before he died, put the farm on a thoroughly sound footing, and had launched the dairy scheme which she had successfully carried through. She had a son and a daughter to help her ; the other children were married. Maggie seemed thoroughly happy and content, and apparently wasted few regrets on Harman, though she frankly told Rainger that the last years of their married life had been passed in a happiness and sympathy she would not, in earlier days, have thought possible.

" He wur a good man to me, ever since . . . Lord, Frank, wot hemmed fools we wur, you and me ! "

" To be in love ! "

"Yes—when we knew as how it wur love as cud only work harm to us both. Now I see how kind and sensible Harman wur about me—though I thought no good of him at the time. Still, I'm sorry you had to go away, for I reckon you had an unaccountable hard time and got naun to show fur it. When the föalkes here heard as how you wur out in Mexico, we all mäade sure as you'd come back rich."

Frank shook his head. "On the contrary, I've come back poorer than I went."

"Wot are you going to do now?"

"I'm going to help at Moon's Green. Dave said he could keep me on if I did some work, and I've nowhere else to go."

"Shall you be happy at Moon's Green, Frank?"

"Yes, Maggie, very happy. I feel that all I want now is to spend my days quietly, and work, and read, and think, and walk in the fields and see the old places I used to love."

"I reckon you've found everything unaccountable changed in these parts."

"Well . . . ."

"Howsumdever, you'll get used to it all in time, and maybe disremember as you've ever been away," and she smiled broadly, showing her still sound and even teeth.

"I don't know that I want to do that. Some day, Maggie, I'll tell you all about those years I spent in America. I had some wonderful adventures out there."

"Wot sort of adventures?"

"Battles, a shipwreck, Indians."

"That sounds jest lik the game you used to play when you wur a liddle chap. Do you remember how you used to say as the wood over at Lossenham wur full of Indians, so as I hardly durst go by it?"

"And do you remember how you said there were ghosteses in Mopesden Wood, so that I'd scarcely go within a mile?" . . .

When Bill Harman came in to supper, he found his mother and Frank Rainger leaning over their knees beside

the fire, and talking of their childhood and the scrapes and adventures they had shared in half-forgotten years.

§ 4

The winter passed very quietly. There was no snow, and not much cold, only a continual dampness, as of a thin cloud clinging to the Isle of Oxney. The Rother and the Reading Sewer, and the dykes of their marshes overflowed, and the Isle of Oxney became an island in fact, ringed round with the steely, shallow water of the overflow, which sometimes was white or grey with the sky above it, and sometimes green with the grass underneath. Pale green and brown and grey were the colours of earth and sky, with sometimes a steely shining of the water and a faint yellow shining of the sun, the only spots of light in that smudged and misted country.

Frank had one or two twinges of rheumatism, but nothing serious. He worked hard during the day, and in the evenings kept warm and dry. He bought a few books on a visit to Hastings—some of Thackeray's which he had not read, *Esmond* and *The Virginians* and the unfinished *Denis Duval*, also a novel by an author he had never heard of till then, George Meredith, who wrote in a queer, vital, misty way that perplexed and delighted him after the slipshod heartiness of the giant and hero of his youth. These and one or two others he read in the kitchen at Moon's Green, in the winter evenings, when the mist beaded on the gutters and ran down the walls of the old farm—and sometimes he read them in the kitchen of Mockbeggar, for Maggie liked him to come to supper, and he liked the walk home through the cold muffled darkness, with his feet sucking in the mud. "Bring your book," Maggie would say; "you always were the one fur books. I shan't vrother you—I'll sit beside you wud my sewing, and never open my lips"—and would never cease talking all the long evening through; but he liked her pleasant voice, and in time found that he could read undisturbed by her commonplaces.

His return had not created much stir in the village now it was known that he had brought back no wealth to prop the crumbling fortunes of Moon's Green. His position on Dave Coalbran's farm struck people as rather ignominious, and they did not believe him when he said he was happy and had looked forward to just such a life as this when he started from Mexico.

As a matter of fact, what he said was perfectly true. He was quite happy, and wanted nothing better. He had found the old friends, Dave, Eliza, and Maggie, and the old places, Moon's Green, Mockbeggar, Wittersham village, and the Rother marshes. He liked his work, and did not find it degrading—on the contrary, his position at Moon's Green was infinitely better than the position he had filled for eleven years at the Presbytery of Zicxin. There he had been just Francisco the peon, only a degree above the Indians with their oiled and naked skins; here, though ostensibly working under David for a very small wage, he was in reality a partner and equal, to whose superior knowledge and resource David often bowed down—he had almost attained the level of the days when his name was painted with Dave's and Tom's on the wagons that carried the fame and crops of Moon's Green to farms beyond the Isle.

He threw himself back into the social life of the place; picking up the old threads as if he had never left them trailing and tangled for fifteen years. He renewed his connection with the Tenterden Freemasons as if he had never seen wounded and captured men on the battle-field make the Sign of the Widow's Son in a last appeal to their enemies. He went every Sunday morning to hear "Dearly beloved brethren" in the plastered church that smelled of sweet old stones as if he had never worshipped the Indian Christ in the dirty Roman church at Zicxin, and learned wisdom of the broken, weed-grown altars of the Xlap-pak. He did not, after eleven years' communion with the age-old mysteries of Rome, find anything cold or unfulfilling in the rites of the English Church. He saw in them the native growth of English soil, peculiarly appro-

priate to its coldness, denial, and uncertainty, just as the Roman Church was appropriate to the coloured lavishness of the southern earth, with its riot of good and evil growth. He could not have pictured any other faith among those pale damp fields and stingy crops, and when he knelt in Wittersham Church he felt in communion with the soil of the Isle of Oxney, as in days to come he would be one with it in Wittersham Churchyard.

He sometimes went of an evening to sit in the bar of the Plough, and drink in the politics and tattle of the Island with bitter malty draughts of Kentish ale. He found himself for a long time treated almost as a stranger, and with the proper amount of suspicion due to his long absence and penniless return. Sometimes he would be moved to tell the farmers in the bar about his adventures, but this was not often, for he was shy of telling his life to men who were inclined to look upon it as a failure. Also, he realised with a thrill of amusement that his credibility was doubted, and that he was looked upon as an imposer on stay-at-home men's honest ignorance and a teller of travellers' tales. He once overheard Dave say to his Eliza that he hoped as how Frank 'ud be forgiven, and he once saw Luck of Barrow's Land wink at Vidler of Birdskitchen after Frank had been telling the story of his shipwreck on the coast of Yucatan. Somehow this distrust, this economy of belief, this suspicion of all that was "furrin" and unknown, delighted him, and warmed his heart towards the farmers of the Isle of Oxney. He loved their caution and their materialism which would believe only what it could see and hear and handle. He loved their slowness, their unwillingness to accept either him or his tales, just as the earth they worked on was unwilling and slow.

He found, however, that he always had an eager audience in the boys. Young Phil Coalbran and young Bill Harman loved to hear of Uncle Frank's adventures in the American War. They listened open-mouthed while he told them how he had slept through the battle of Shiloh, how he had stormed up the bluff to the walls of Corinth

shouting "Yay-ay-ay!" and had crept out of Vicksburg on a moonless night and tramped through the steaming green heat of the Mississippi forest to Jackson. He told them of Tom Coalbran's noble death at Murfreesboro, and how he lay buried out there on the hill of the Three Sergeants, rolled up in the torn Palmetto flag, and how Pete Zollicoffer lay buried beside the rail at Rough-and-Ready. He told them of Dixie's overthrow at Chattanooga, of the heroes of Shiloh running with hands stretched out before them, broken and defeated, down Look Out Mountain; then of the long retreat to Atlanta, at last the evacuation of the city, to the crash of exploding ordnance trains. He never gave them any details of his capture by the Yankees, and they found him distinctly dull on the subject of the buried cities of Yucatan, but they would sit for hours drinking in stories of battle, and wished that Frank had been more often willing to tell them.

He had his own life apart from Moon's Green and Mockbeggar. Sometimes, in the slackness of the winter's work, he took long walks by himself in the surrounding country, reviving the memories of his wanderings as a boy. He would go to Four Wents and Iden Green, and down to the brook which runs through the fields of Little Nineveh, and in which he and Maggie had dipped their bread on the morning they ran away to Cranbrook Fair. That bread had tasted of the earthy water of the stream, and so did the bread he dipped in it now . . . the bread of his childhood and the bread of his age had the same sweet earthy flavour.

He would go too to Biddenden and Bethersden far away, by Rats Castle and Stede Quarter and Castwisell, across the hills where the low clouds lie. He crossed the Rother into Sussex by the osier beds of Peening Quarter, and looked over the level at Methersham, to Maytham wharf, where the black coal-barges with the red sails were unloading above the sluice; and he also went to that little beer-smelling inn at Benenden where he had once slept the sleep of exhausted sorrow with his head on the table, and

had wakened to find the room full of sunset, and dim cobwebs of light hanging in the rafters. . . .

§ 5

Frank liked to talk about his past life to Maggie, though she often interrupted him with information as to the new calf's progress or how many eggs had been gathered that morning. Naturally he did not tell her about the battles, but he told her what he had told no one else, of his love for Lorena Middleton—how he had wooed her in that garden of spices, and buried her there. Maggie's heart ached to hear the story, which he told quite simply, without a sigh.

"Poor, poor Frank," she said tenderly. "I reckon it wur a tar'ble shock, and I wäonder as you've lived it down. Do you ever think of it now?"

"Sometimes."

"Well, well, you must remember as it's all over and done with, my dear. . . ." She went across to him, and smoothed back the hair from his forehead. "I know wot you feel, because there's just one thing about Harman's death that vrothers me, and I try to disremember it, and I can't. He wur always asking fur the liddle red flower on his quilt—a sort of rose. 'Give me that dentical liddle flower,' he'd say—'I want to smell it'—and he'd go asking fur it a dunnamany times, and I never thought till afterwards as how I cud have got a flower out of the garden and pretended it was the säum, to comfort him, poor soul."

She lifted the corner of her apron to her face, then smiled at Frank with perfect kindness and understanding.

"So I know what you feel, my dear."

As the year advanced, Frank found himself coming more and more often to the kitchen at Mockbeggar, to sit with Maggie in the firelight. Even when the evenings grew long, and the tender primrose light of spring mixed with the dancing flames upon the hearthstone, he still came; and sometimes they sat on the bench against the house, their nostrils full of the evening scents of the

garden—Lent lilies, soil, and mist—looking down at the marsh that spread all vague and grey to the foot of Tenterden Hill. They would sit and gaze at the dusk-bloomed sky, in alternate moods of cheerful talk and silence, till the wind rustled up cold from Ethnam and the old Plough hung above the Weald.

Her presence satisfied and soothed him. Prosperity had shaved off her angles, and rubbed down the little aching fretfulness that had sometimes chafed him in days gone by. He liked her simple motherliness towards him, her frankness and tranquillity—there were no reserves in her attitude, and she spoke of the past with a calm common sense that removed any lurkings of its sting. Above all he loved her little airs of patronage and toleration; it delighted him to think that she who in all her life had not slept five miles from home should know herself wiser than he who had roamed the world.

He would have liked to ask her to marry him, for he loved her very dearly. All the long-buried sweetness of his love for her had revived, leaving the bitterness dead. In the place of passion was a tender, tolerant affection, a flame which gave more light than heat. But he knew that he could not ask this well-to-do, successful woman to mate with him, a failure, without a penny beyond his hire. It would not be right or seemly, and besides, he gathered from various tokens that she had no wish to marry again. Thank Heaven that he had reached an age when he could enjoy her company without any thoughts beyond it, and love her without aching or desire.

There was no reason why they should not lead this comfortable semi-detached life to the end of their days. He now spent his evenings at Mockbeggar three or four times a week; Maggie's boy and girl both liked him, and he was always welcome at the family table. Moreover, on one or two matters to do with the farm, he was able to help her very substantially. His experience was both wide and thorough, and he combined with it a quickness which her more plodding intelligence lacked. More than

one little success she was able to put down to his good advice, and her gratitude drew them closer to each other.

He knew well that she loved him truly and tenderly. He was always her " poor soul " and her " dear," the child she pitied. He gathered from some words she let fall that she was not satisfied with the way Dave's Eliza took care of him—she suspiciously inspected the darns in his socks, and prepared for him special dainties which were absent from the table at Moon's Green—she would not understand that the fact that he was the only person in the house who liked a " plum duff " was a good reason for there never being one for dinner.

One evening, when they were sitting indoors by the fire, as a shower was pattering on the leaves out of a shifting sky, she said—

" Frank, I döan't lik your pläace at Moon's Green."

" What do you mean, Maggie ? "

" I mean it äun't fitting as you shud be living there lik that—a kind of servant in the house, and föalkses up at the village talking of you as if you wur no better'n a ploughman—you who come of gentle birth."

" I'm perfectly happy."

" I daresay you are, fur you're a comfortable sort of chap. But it 'ud be better if you wur managing this farm here, seeing to the accounts, and täaking a bit o' that milk-round off my shoulders."

" But, Maggie, I couldn't come here."

" Why not ? You've done many a job fur me and done it valiant, and though we're gitting on in years we've a right to love each other just the säum."

He stared at her in surprise, but his wild conjecture died before her cheerful, candid gaze.

" All the same," he said, " I don't think I could come and live here."

" But, Frank, you wanted me when I was a girl, and I döan't think as how you love me any less now than you did then, though it's in a different way. As fur me I reckon I love you more now than I've ever done in my life."

He could not fail to understand now. His face went white under its sunburn, and his lips quivered.

" Maggie, Maggie . . . you don't mean that you want me to marry you ? " . . .

" Well, wot else shud I be meaning, dear ? "

He slid from his chair to his knees, and hid his face in her apron.

§ 6

The Isle of Oxney took upon itself to be scandalised at the marriage of Frank and Maggie. Every one was quite sure that Frank had asked her for the sake of her money—he had crowned a disreputable career by marrying a rich widow for mercenary motives. What had made her accept him ? It was well known in the village that she had refused Luck of Barrow's Land and Fleet of Old Turk, both well-set-up substantial men. What could have brought her to accept this prodigal who worked for hire and had no fortune but his broad, weather-reddened face ?

The scandal spread from the Plough to the Parsonage, and the Parson, Cyril Peters, a follower of Keble and Pusey from a safe distance, told his wife that he was sorry that Church discipline did not give him an excuse for refusing to perform the ceremony.

" The man is a rank adventurer, and is after the widow's money."

" Perhaps he's in love with her I've been told that he was in love with her years ago."

" Yes, I believe there was some scandal, on account of which he had to leave this neighbourhood ; but that only makes matters worse."

" He looks quite a harmless sort of man."

" I agree, harmless and rather stupid. But we should not be misled by appearances. I hear nothing to his credit. He fought for slavery in the American War, and afterwards, I am told, joined the Church of Rome."

" Surely that can't be true. He is most regular in his attendance here, and comes once a month to Communion."

"Oh, he probably reverted directly he found himself in a country where Romanism doesn't pay. But I don't think much of his churchmanship. What do you think he said to me the other day?—I forget what we were talking about—'I've made God rich through my life, and He has made me rich through His death.'"

"Is that Romanism?"

"No—heathenism, my dear, sheer heathenism, at any rate the first part; he's lived among Indians, and I expect when he was with them he did as they did, just as he does as we do now. He has no principles—Heathenism, Romanism, Anglicanism are all one to him. I wish I had a right to refuse to officiate on Thursday."

But the ecclesiastical canons had not foreseen such a case. Frank was not marrying within the Table of Kindred and Affinity, and no one forebade the banns, so the Church perforce bestowed a rather unconvincing and vinegary blessing.

Frank and Maggie were married early in May. Maggie's girl, Alice, was bridesmaid to her mother, and young Bill was Frank's best man, so there was obviously no opposition from the widow's family—indeed Bill conceived an almost embarrassing affection for his stepfather, which, combined with the fact that he and Rainger both had freckles, made the village maliciously speculate as to exactly how long he was born after Frank left the Isle.

When the married pair came out of the church and stood on the porch steps in the soft May sunshine, Frank—for the first time since his return—realised a little sadly how late in the day he had been given his desire. But the regret was only a fugitive pang. As he looked over the marshes to the sunny cloud-streaked hills where the Weald villages stood, he knew that his whole life had been built to the pattern of that boyhood's adventure to Cranbrook Circus—worth while in spite of hard blows and the price paid. He saw himself, on that evening long ago, sitting on Maggie's bed, and shaking her hunched shoulders. "Look here, it's been worth while. What

I've suffered, I'd suffer over again, if I could have the rest over again too." And he had gone to sleep, happy and thankful and thrilled, as he would go now when his time came. . . .

Then he looked down at Maggie at his side, all in grey like a dove, with her eyes like a dove's eyes. If he had not been given the woman he loved most, he had been given the woman he loved longest. Maggie and he had wandered and worked apart, during the burden and heat of the day, but now they would spend the evening together, as years ago they had spent the morning.

§ 7

Under Frank's management, Mockbeggar prospered more than ever. In the year 1885, Maggie opened a greengrocer's shop in Rye, and two years later a dairy in Hastings. The Rother Valley Railway, though it alarmed and disgusted the inhabitants of the Isle of Oxney, and made them feel almost suburban, provided hitherto undreamed-of means of transport and opened foreign regions to the enterprising.

There was no denying that Mockbeggar was enterprising. Between the greengrocer's shop and the Hastings dairy, Maggie, advised by her husband, actually bought Moon's Green, and put into it her son Bill and the wife he had taken from the Foul Mile over by Horsmonden. For, that harvest of 1885, poor old Dave Coalbran was caught up, mauled, and thrown out by his wonderful new steam-reaper. " A judgment on me," he gasped as he lay dying, " fur using such tedious new-fangled furrin notions. If I'd stuck to th' öald ways, I shud have died of rheumatiz lik a good yeoman."

Dave's Eliza moved off with her boy to Appledore, where she bought a little shop with what Dave had left her, and found the life so exciting that she wondered however she " cud have stuck so long in that dead and buried, God-forsaken hole of a Moon's Green."

Mockbeggar was now the most prosperous farm in the

Isle of Oxney, and Frank got some of the credit, though not so much as if he had not worked harder himself than any one on it. But he insisted on doing most of the work, for he kept wonderfully hale, and loved to feel the sweat run over his skin. There was not much fear of his dying as yet like a good yeoman, for Maggie took far too good care of him, and the rheumatism scarcely made more than one snap at him of a winter.

He did not fulfil the local expectation that he would neglect Maggie for her farm. He and she were finishing their life as if they had spent the whole of it together in happy wedlock, instead of having met again only just before it was too late. He had given up his habit of lonely tramps, for after all he was getting old, and liked to sit and doze in his spare time. But he would often take Maggie for a drive in his gig—north to the Kentish hills, or south to the Sussex woods—and though they were both old people, and filled the gig-seat rather too generously, he would feel as if he was living over again the days when they had scoured the country together, and shared wonderful adventures and shining discoveries.

In spite of their quiet life they were sharing adventures and discoveries still, for they were finding how much of the old Frank and the old Maggie still remained. Gradually the years between their linked childhood and their linked old age seemed to grow fewer and shorter, till at last youth and age came to meet and merge, and the years between were forgotten.

One afternoon in April he drove her out by Lomas to Wassall, and, leaving the old horse tethered in the lane, they squeezed adventurously through the hedge, into the little copse where the primroses grew. It was a soft, uncertain day, with a changing sky of grey and blue, against which the ash trees shook in the wind. The air was soft with the smell of moss and loam, the scent of the primroses hanging faintly above it—a timid, hesitating spring above the mould.

The primrose hollow was like a dropped spring sky, a

cloud of pale yellow at the foot of the ashes. Moved by one of the reviving impulses of his youth, Frank kneeled down and laid his cheek against the rainy flowers.

" There, Frank ! . . . wot a silly you are ! " laughed Maggie.

" Silly yourself," he said, laughing back at her—" why, I've seen you do sillier things than that. I've seen you refuse to take a bunch of pignut into the house, for fear your mother 'ud die."

" That äun't silly—it's sensible."

" How, sensible ? I call it very silly."

" Well, it's known as how if you bring pignut into the house, it . . . there, you're laughing at me, Frank."

" Surely not ! "

He went over to her as she sat on a fallen trunk. For a moment or two he did not speak, then he took her face between his hands and looked down into it.

" Maggie—as time goes on you're getting more and more like the little girl I used to play with."

Maggie laughed, as she always did when she gathered Frank had made a joke.

" You've never bin aught but a boy to me."

" We're growing young together."

" I feel unaccountable old."

" Old, Maggie ! Why ? "

" I've always felt old, I reckon, even when I wur a gal."

" But you've no right to feel old. I feel young, and I've knocked about more than most men."

" You've had a hard life, Frank."

" No, Maggie. I've been very happy. There's nothing I regret in my life—not now. It's been hard in places. . . . But I don't regret it—ever."

" But I do," she murmured, stroking his sleeve. " Sometimes you look so tired when you're asleep."

He had never before seen her plaintive, and he put his arm round her shoulders, patting them reassuringly.

" Cheer up, Maggie. There's nothing to be sad about

in either my life or yours. You stayed at home, and I went away, but it's all come to the same in the end."

They kissed each other, that unromantic, oldish pair, sitting on a log in the copse at Wassall; then Maggie saw that the dew was on the grass.

"Come along back to the gig, and let us git höame. It's drawing in cold, and I'm not a-going to have you on my hands wud rheumaticks."

He rose and stretched himself—he was a bit stiff—and looked round at the sky, which was now the shining pattern of the earth, with primrose patches on the green. Then he helped Maggie through the hedge, and up into the gig. They drove off down the lane, he whistling "Dixie," she leaning against him, with her hand under his arm, against his heart. . . .

The spring sky darkened—a few, faint, yellow stars hung in the north, above Rolvenden. The primrose light faded out of the west, and the shadows crept up the fields with the rustle and scent of grass. For a little while the primroses in the hollow gleamed out of the dusk—a pale patch of light among the ash trees; then they slowly faded, till only the scent remained. . . . The scents of water, earth, and primroses hung on the motionless air.

THE END

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